A HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY

English.	Date of Birth.	Date of Death.
Anthony Munday . .	1553	1633
Robert Greene . .	*circ.* 1555	1592
Thomas Kyd . . .	*circ.* 1557	1595
George Peele . . .	*circ.* 1558	1597
George Chapman . .	1559	1634
Christopher Marlowe .	1560	1592
William Shakespeare .	1564	1616
Thomas Heywood . .	*floruit* 1600–1615	
Thomas Dekker . .	*circ.* 1570	*post* 1632
Thomas Middleton . .	*circ.* 1570	1627
Ben Jonson . . .	1573	1637
John Marston . . .	*circ.* 1575	1632
Cyril Tourneur . .	*floruit* 1600–1610	
John Webster . . .	*floruit* 1600–1624	
John Fletcher . . .	1579	1625
Philip Massinger . .	1584	1640
Francis Beaumont . .	1585	1616
William Rowley . .	*circ.* 1585	*circ.* 1642
John Ford . . .	1586	*post* 1638
Nathaniel Field . .	1587	1633
James Shirley . . .	1594	1666
Shackerley Marmion .	1603	1639
Thomas Randolph . .	1605	1635
Sir William Davenant .	1606	1668
William Cartwright .	1611	1643
Richard Brome . .	—	1652
John Dryden . . .	1632	1700
Thomas Otway . .	1651	1685
Nathaniel Lee . .	1653	1692

French.	Date of Death.
Alexandre Hardy	1616
Antoine de Montch	1635
Theophile de Viau	c. 1590
Jean Desmarets	1–1608
François Tristan	0–1623
George de Scudéry	1638
Jean Mairet .	1631
Pierre Corneille	1644
Jean Rotrou .	1648
Paul Scarron .	2–1635
Cyrano de Bergerac	1639
Jean Baptiste Po (Molière)	1681
Thomas Corneille	—
Philippe Quinault	1686
Jean Racine .	1669
Antoine de Montfleu	1650
Jean Galbert de Cam	1670
Nicolas Pradon	1660
	1692
	1699

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CHAPTER I

THE EPIC AND LYRIC ELEMENTS IN THE EARLY ROMANTIC DRAMA

THE History of Poetry on the English Stage is, roughly speaking, confined within a period limited on one side by the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and on the other by the ordinance of the Long Parliament closing the theatres in 1642. Before the earlier of these two dates our dramatic poetry is rude and embryonic, nor does it include among its motives the principle of romance which is generally recognised as being the characteristic feature of our stage. After the reopening of the theatres the stage, by the aid of rhyme, music, and scenic machinery, was illuminated with a certain external splendour, but its historic life and genius was withered at the root. Between the two dates I have mentioned the poetic drama assumed its proper artistic form, rose to a splendid zenith, and sank in a not inglorious decline. I shall attempt in the following pages to trace the course of this poetical movement through the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I.; to show how the drama reflected in an ideal form the course of national life and action; to examine the general causes that produced the changes of taste in the theatre; and to illustrate the effect of these changes in the art of particular poets.

As the subject so viewed will appear in a somewhat

new light, it may be desirable to point out in the first place how the course of our inquiry must necessarily differ from that hitherto pursued by the historians of the stage in England and Germany. The English historians have, with few exceptions, confined themselves to the record of external facts. Malone and Collier did invaluable service by collecting all available information about the antiquities of the English stage; they told us in their histories practically all that can be discovered as to the dates of the production of plays, the building of theatres, the payment of playwrights and actors,—this being knowledge absolutely essential in forming a just idea of the progress of the poetical drama. But they made no attempt to examine the meaning of these facts in their relation to English poetry as a whole, or to compare the English with any other stage; and Dr. Ward, whose admirable *History of English Dramatic Literature* is designed to fill up the literary void in their system, has naturally restricted himself to judging the merits of our dramatists as individuals, without determining their respective places in the general movement of the drama.

The Germans, on the other hand, have followed the method of what is called "æsthetic" criticism; they interpret the poetical facts with which they have to deal in the light of some *a priori* theory of their own. Augustus Schlegel, who set the example which has been followed in various shapes by all the German critics, assumed, as the starting-point for his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, the critical axioms by which he sought to justify the existence of the school of Romantic poetry in Germany. He held that the differences in spirit and character between the ancient and modern drama were to be explained by the fundamental differences between the heathen and Christian views of life; he regarded the Attic stage, on the one hand, and the English and Spanish stages, on the other, as the emanations and products of two opposing spirits; Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides being, in his view, the avatars of paganism, Shakespeare and Calderon of

Christianity. Shakespeare, whom he treated as the sole representative of the English drama, appeared to him as being, like Melchizedek, almost "without parents and without descent"; he explained the various developments in the history of drama by a series of logical antitheses, "ancient and modern," "Christian and pagan," "classic and romantic"; the divergences in the form of the Attic and English plays he supposed to be due to the influence, in the one case, of sculpture, *par excellence* the art of the Greeks, and, in the other, to that of painting, the characteristic art of Christian Europe. The germ of his critical hypothesis is contained in the following passage:—

> The poetry of the ancients was the poetry of enjoyment, and ours is that of desire: the former has its foundation in the scene which is present, while the latter hovers betwixt recollection and hope. . . . The Grecian ideal of human nature was perfect union and proportion between all the powers, a natural harmony. The moderns, on the contrary, have arrived at a consciousness of internal discord, which renders such an ideal impossible, and *hence the endeavour of their poetry is to reconcile these two* worlds between which we find ourselves divided, so as to blend them indissolubly together. The impressions of the senses are to be hallowed, as it were, by a mysterious connection between higher feelings; and the soul, on the other hand, embodies its forebodings or indescribable intuitions of infinity in types and symbols borrowed from the visible world.[1]

I am far from denying that this metaphysical antithesis accounts for some of the differences between the ancient and modern dramas; but it does not cover all the facts of the case. There are many Greek tragedies in which the sense of spiritual discord is vividly expressed, notably the *Eumenides*, the *Antigone*, and the *Philoctetes* Contrarily, were it true that there is between Christian and pagan art the sharp opposition that Schlegel imagines, we should have found the "romantic" style appearing on the stages of all Christian countries; yet Schlegel himself, though apparently unaware of the significance of his admission, recognises the fact that the only countries of

[1] Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (Bohn's Edition 1846), pp. 26, 27.

modern Europe in which this style has flourished are Spain and England; while in Italy and France the form of the drama has been mainly determined by models taken from the classical ages.

The fundamental error in the *a priori* system of æsthetic criticism is that it applies to the facts it observes "the method of difference," without previously applying "the method of agreement." Had Schlegel compared the Greek and English dramas, side by side, in their origin and in the whole manner of their development, he would certainly have been struck with the many points in which they resembled each other, and he might have discovered deeper reasons for their characteristic divergences than those which he actually assigns. Both in fact had their foundations in the nature of man; both came into existence under very similar conditions of society; both, in perfecting their respective forms, passed through the same inevitable stages of invention and taste. These natural affinities must be appreciated before we can understand the radical differences in their artistic character.

The modern, like the ancient, drama arose out of the instinct of imitation, implanted in all human beings. In modern Europe, as in ancient Greece, the first mode of poetically imitating action was the epic song of the single minstrel, and, as Plato very sagaciously divined, epic poetry contains in itself the germ of the drama:—

SOCRATES. It is equally narrative, is it not, whether the poet is reciting the occasional speeches, or describing the intermediate events?

GLAUCUS. Undoubtedly it is.

SOCRATES. But when he delivers the speech in the character of another man, shall we not say that, on every such occasion, he aims at the closest resemblance of style to the person introduced as the speaker?

GLAUCUS. We shall of course.

SOCRATES. But when one man assumes a resemblance to another in voice or look is not that imitation?

GLAUCUS. Undoubtedly it is.

SOCRATES. Then in such cases it appears that both Homer and other poets carry on the narrative through the medium of imitation.[1]

[1] Plato, *Republic*, book iii.

flower. The detachment of a single member of the chorus, to represent to the spectators the incidents of the myth; the successive addition of the second and third actors, to make the complication of the story more real and distinct; the preponderance of the epic and lyric elements in the tragedies of Æschylus; the gradual attainment of a perfect balance of interest between the plot and the chorus, in the plays of Sophocles; the over-elaboration of the plot, and the degradation of the chorus into a mere musical interlude, by Euripides,—all this constitutes a history of rise and decline, simple, unbroken, regular. On the other hand, the English drama developed itself through a number of distinct forms, each apparently possessing an isolated organism of its own—the Miracle Play, the Morality, the Romantic tragedy and comedy; it is difficult, at first sight, to trace the course by which the progress of taste passes from one of these forms to another; and the tendency of the late English poetic drama to return towards its original starting-point is a phenomenon that does not occur in the history of the Greek stage.

The explanation of this striking contrast is undoubtedly to be found—though not quite in the manner imagined by Schlegel—in the opposite character of the religions of Greece and England, the differing relations of Church and State. In Attic tragedy the subject matter is contained in the myth, which was capable of assuming at pleasure either a secular or a sacred aspect. The myth might be regarded as an amusing story, or as the record of an inherited religious belief. According to the light in which it was viewed by the dramatist, it could associate itself with profound ethical emotions, or provide materials for an ingeniously contrived plot. But in mediæval Europe the only matter which the Church, for a long time, recognised as suitable for imitation, either in epic or dramatic poetry, was the narrative of the Scriptures or of saintly legend: the tales and histories of the Trouvères, told for the purposes of amusement, were condemned as idle and profane. Robert of Brunne, as we have seen, regarded Miracle Plays as lawful entertainments only in so far as they were

used to instruct the people in religious truths.[1] The author of *Cursor Mundi*, a poetical history of the world according to the ecclesiastical chronicles, complains of the pleasure his countrymen took in reading the profane romances of chivalry.[2] In course of time ecclesiastical policy changed. The authorities of the Church turned the popular love of the *fabliaux* to religious account by reading a sacred allegory into each of the secular stories of the *Gesta Romanorum*. A new turn was thus given to mediæval epic poetry. Gower followed in the same track in his *Confessio Amantis*; and even so close an imitator of Nature as Chaucer was careful to preserve in his *Canterbury Tales* the didactic vein introduced into the art of story-telling by the intervention of the Church.

On the stage the imitation of secular action for its own sake made its way with greater difficulty, and though the natural love of tragedy and comedy contrived to satisfy itself by various devices, yet, as the subject matter of the Miracle Plays was confined to the Scripture story of Man's Fall, Redemption, and Final Judgment, there was little opportunity given in them for invention and novelty. Æschylus and Euripides might, in succeeding generations, treat one and the same myth on the stage in the spirit of religion or in the spirit of scepticism; no mediæval dramatist could deal with the sacred dogmas of his faith in any but the serious temper which had inspired those who had given the Miracle Play its original form. Hence, if the taste for secular imitation was to prevail against the didactic spirit of the Church, it was absolutely necessary to invent a new dramatic form. A step in the direction of the secularisation of the stage was made in the invention of the Morality. It is highly probable that this variety of the Miracle owed its existence to the popular desire for novel imitation, certainly the Morality gave scope for a larger freedom of representation, by exhibiting the action of a number of abstract personages in a regularly contrived plot. The plot of the Morality again was employed with considerable skill to reflect the transient

[1] See vol. I. p. 395.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 135.

opinions and even the passions of the age. We have seen how the old play, *The Four Elements*, embodied the scientific teaching of the early Renaissance, and how many of the interludes after 1530 enforced, in a partisan spirit, the moral of the Protestant Reformers.[1] Still, as being the intellectual offspring of the ecclesiastical spirit, and primarily designed for the purposes of instruction, the Moral drama was ill-adapted to represent in an ideal form the new conceptions of action vaguely taking shape in the imagination of the English people.

Undoubtedly the tendency of things in the reign of Elizabeth was anti-Catholic. For nearly a hundred years the spirit of the Italian Renaissance had permeated the intellectual portion of society. A growing sense of the power of the human will, a more refined perception of the beauty of art and of the undeveloped resources of science, enlarged the national imagination, and fuel was added to the fire by the many Englishmen who travelled to learn the arts of life in the corrupt cities of Italy, where they amazed the inhabitants themselves by the zest and fury of their enjoyment. *Inglese Italianato*, said the proverb, *diavolo incarnato*. The classes specially affected by Italian influences were the aristocracy, in whom the spirit of chivalry had decayed, and the university scholars, whose mind had been emancipated by the new learning; one class found its model in the coxcombry of the Earl of Oxford, the other in the debauchery of Robert Greene.

Closely allied with the enthusiasm for intellectual liberty was the passion for national independence, the feeling expressed so vehemently by the Bastard in *King John*:—

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror.

All ranks and orders shared the sentiment, but under the stimulus of different motives. The knightly courtier—Sidney, Essex, or Raleigh—found in a spirited foreign policy, or in the enterprise of voyage and discovery, something to compensate his imagination for the loss of romantic chivalry; the more domestic citizen felt in-

[1] Vol. ii. pp. 337-44.

stinctively that the growth of his worldly prosperity depended on the resolution with which he maintained his religious freedom against the usurpations of Pope and Spaniard. Both the aristocracy and the middle classes exalted the person of their Sovereign as the visible sign of the greatness and liberty of their country, and as their defence against every foreign foe. In their fervent love of monarchy, in their passionate admiration for the heroic exploits of great seamen like Drake and Hawkins, and in their appreciation of individual energy, resolution, *virtù*, there was stored up in the breasts of most Englishmen in Elizabeth's age a fund of heroic feeling which found no reflection in the didactic form of the Morality.

The first poet to find a dramatic outlet for this volume of social emotion was Christopher Marlowe. With the feeling of patriotism, indeed, Marlowe seems to have had little sympathy, at least it is almost absent as a motive of action in his *dramatis personae*. But in the intensity of his belief in the virtue of self-reliance, and in his appreciation of riches and power, he was an Englishman representative both of his own and of every other age. An enthusiastic student of Machiavelli, he preached the gospel of "Resolution" on the stage with the fiery zeal of an apostle. The popular forms of the drama were too petty for his imagination. Disdaining the restrictions of the Morality, and without any model before him but the plays of Seneca and such blank verse as had been used in *Gorboduc* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, he broke forth, like the Scythian shepherd he so much admired, the conqueror of a new world of art. In *Tamburlaine* he transported the imagination of his audience to wide and distant realms, he inflamed it with his gorgeous descriptions of the unexplored regions of the globe and its untold treasures of gold, jewels and precious stones. In his characters he painted boundless ambition, illimitable curiosity, ruthless and deliberate revenge. The poetical justice which determines the form of the Morality has no place in the dramas of Marlowe: will-worship is his pole star: the only deity whose power he recognises as superior to that of man is Fortune

Of the lives and works of the early Elizabethan dramatists I have spoken in a former volume,[1] but something must here be added, to show the effect of the spirit, by which they were animated, on the form of the Romantic drama.

The genius of the founder of the Romantic drama is essentially lyrical; in the vehement emotion which inspires the speeches of his *dramatis personæ*, he projects into an external form the prevalent ideas of himself and his audience. When Tamburlaine enters on the stage, "very melancholy and all in black," subduing in his breast the natural feelings of love and compassion, as he decrees the destruction of his wife's native city, that is the outward form in which Marlowe embodies the highest conception he can frame of energy and resolution. It is Marlowe, represented in the person of the same hero, who kills his son for cowardice, defies Mahomet to prevent the destruction of his shrines and sacred books, and lets his imagination run riot in describing the still unconquered treasures of the earth. Spiritual experiences, well understood by the Calvinists of the day—"the sentence of God's predestination whereby the Devil doth thrust men down either unto desperation or into wretchlessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation,"—are expressed by the poet with intense sympathy in the person of Faustus:—

> Now, Faustus, must
> Thou needs be damned, and canst thou not be saved:
> What boots it then to think of God or heaven?
> Away with such vain fancies, and despair:
> Now go not backward; no, Faustus, be resolute:
> Why waver'st thou? O something soundeth in mine ears,
> "Abjure this magic, turn to God again!"
> Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
> To God? he loves thee not;
> The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
> Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub.[2]

And with the same unrestrained passion Marlowe, in the character of a Jew, breathes the fiery longings of his own English nature for power and wealth:—

[1] Vol. ii. chap. xii.

[2] Marlowe's *Works* (Dyce), p. 85.

These are the blessings promised to the Jews,
And herein was old Abraham's happiness.
What more may heaven do for earthly man,
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,
Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,
Making the seas their servants, and the winds
To drive their substance with successful blasts?[1]

But this lyrical intensity prevented Marlowe from attaining to anything like perfection in the structure of his dramas. Absorbed in sympathy with the progress of one victorious will, he was unable to conceive those interesting situations which arise out of the collision between many struggling passions. His plays are always founded on some well-known action derived from legend, history, or contemporary experience; but he cannot imagine this epic action as a dramatic whole. *Tamburlaine*, *Edward II.*, and *The Massacre at Paris*, all consist of a succession of unconnected, and often uninteresting, episodes, from one to other of which the poet travels heavily, until he can reach some situation giving him an opportunity to pour himself forth in a rush of sympathetic eloquence. The progress of the action of *Faustus* is explained by a chorus; but the only interesting portions of the play are those in which the hero is shown receiving conflicting suggestions from his good and evil angels; uttering his passion for the spirit of Helen of Troy; conversing with Mephistophilis; or breaking into his last despairing soliloquy. The action follows closely the prose narrative of the pamphlet containing the story; and, in order to adapt this to the stage, the dramatist is forced to "pad" the intervals between the episodes with comic scenes, uncongenial to his own temper, and preserved only for the gratification of an audience accustomed to the "clownage" of the Moralities. In his historical plays Marlowe takes no pains to realise in imagination the necessary course of events. *Edward II.*, for example, is full of gross improbabilities in the representation of time and place; nor is there any attempt in the play to exhibit the development of character in a sequence of connected

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actions. Something of the didactic temper of the old drama still survives in Marlowe's practice: he uses the stage as a pulpit from which to preach the gospel of Machiavelli, just as his predecessors had used it to improve the audience with moral common-place.

The same defects of form reveal themselves in the plays of Marlowe's contemporaries and associates, Greene and Peele, each of whom flattered their friend's superiority with a reluctant tribute of imitation, while they imparted to the romantic drama certain peculiarities of their own. Greene began his career as a novelist, and his stories of *Menaphon* and *Pandosto* have all the characteristics of love, misfortune, and adventure proper to romance. His genius had more of feminine tenderness and sympathy than Marlowe's: what he strove to imitate in the work of the younger poet was his spacious imagination and the pomp of his blank verse. The opening of his *Orlando Furioso* furnishes a good example of the effect of Marlowe's style on Greene's romantic genius:—

> Victorious princes, summoned to appear
> Within the continent of Africa,
> From seven-fold Nilus to Taprobany,
> Where fair Apollo, darting forth his light,
> Plays on the seas;
> From Gades islands, where stout Hercules
> Emblazed his trophies on the posts of brass,
> To Tanais, whose swift declining floods
> Environ rich Europa to the north;
> All fetched
> From out your Courts by beauty to this coast,
> To seek and sue for fair Angelica;
> Sith none but one may have this happy prize,
> At which you all have levelled long your thoughts,
> Set each man forth his passion how he can,
> And let her censure make the happiest man.[1]

On the other hand, Greene's conception of romance gives his dramas more human interest than Marlowe's. He mixed comedy and tragedy, and, through his representations of the passion of love, introduced some complexity of structure into the new romantic style. Com-

[1] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 89.

plications are brought about in his *Orlando Furioso* by the jealousy and madness of the hero; in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* by the passion of Prince Edward for the fair Maid of Fressingfield, and by Margaret's own love for the Prince's emissary sent to woo her on behalf of his master; in *James IV.* by the King's preference of the Countess Ida to Dorothea, his Queen. These entanglements prepare the way for contrasted scenes of self-sacrifice and repentance, quite unlike Marlowe's unvarying representations of conquest, ambition, and revenge.

But Greene showed little more capacity than Marlowe for fusing epic materials into a dramatic form. His plays, like the other's, are a heap of isolated episodes, with clumsy devices to explain the progress of the action. In *A Looking Glass for London* the prophet Osee appears between the scenes in the capacity of chorus; in *James IV.* Bohan, a Scot, exhibits the play for the edification of Oberon, King of the Fairies. *The Comical History of Alphonsus* opens with the following instruction—*After you have sounded thrice let Venus be let down from the top of the stage.* The goddess appears, and laments the want of modern pens fitted to describe heroic exploits, after which she breaks into this apostrophe:—

> O Virgil, Virgil, wert thou now alive,
> Whose painful pen, in stout Augustus' days,
> Did dain [1] to let the base and silly fly
> To 'scape away without thy praise of her,
> I do not doubt but long or ere this time
> Alphonsus' fame into the heavens should climb.[2]

The Muses then enter, all of them, especially Calliope, in a melancholy mood; and when they have discoursed despondingly for some time, Venus declares that, as there is no one else ready to set forth heroic deeds of war, she will do it herself:—

> Then sound your pipes, and let us bend our steps
> Unto the top of high Parnassus Hill,
> And there together do our best devoir
> For to describe Alphonsus' warlike fame,

[1] Disdain. [2] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 225.

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> Then sound your pipes, and let us bend our steps
> Unto the top of high Parnassus Hill,
> And there together do our best devoir
> For to describe Alphonsus' warlike fame,

[1] Deign.

[2] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 225.

And in the manner of a comedy
Set down his noble valour presently.[1]

Then follow the acts of Alphonsus, just like the adventures of Tamburlaine; but, since the hero of Greene's play is a person who excites little interest, Venus is obliged to appear before each act to let the spectators know how the course of affairs is advancing.

Peele, in the early Romantic Triumvirate, occupied a middle position: he had less passion than Marlowe, less sentiment than Greene. But he inherited more of the spirit and tradition of the old English stage than either, whereby he was enabled in his best dramas—particularly in *David and Bethsabe*, which presents impressively the action of Sin, Conscience, and Repentance—to preserve an appearance of form and regularity. He shared too, what Marlowe never did, the patriotic emotions of his audience, which he expresses admirably in the speech of the Queen Mother at the beginning of *Edward I.*:—

Illustrious England, ancient seat of kings,
Whose chivalry hath royalised thy name,
That sounding bravely through terrestrial vale,
Proclaiming conquests, spoils, and victories,
Rings glorious echoes through the farthest world;
What warlike nation, trained in feats of arms,
What barbarous people, stubborn or untamed,
What climate under the meridian signs,
Or frozen zone under his brumal stage,
Erst have not quaked and trembled at the name
Of Britain and her mighty conquerors?[2]

Here, without question, we have a note inspired by the defeat of the Spanish Armada; and if we assume *Edward I.* to have appeared before *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, the speeches of the rival claimants to the throne of Scotland, in the former play, probably furnished the model for those animated State debates which abound in the historical dramas of Shakespeare. Greene, in his *Repentance*, speaks of Peele as being in certain points superior to Marlowe, no doubt in allusion to his sympathetic stage rhetoric, which was admirably adapted to

[1] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 226. [2] *Ibid.* p. 377.

rouse the enthusiasm of the pit. Marlowe's rants are usually the product of his own lyrical fervour; but Peele, in carrying on his master's style with added sound and fury, indulged the taste of his audience. The following speech of Muly Mahamet, who, in *The Battle of Alcazar*, is represented (for no particular reason) starving with his wife in the desert, affords a good specimen of this poet's musical nonsense:—

> Hold thee, Calipolis, feed and faint no more.
> This flesh I forced from a lioness,
> Meat of a princess, for a princess meet:
> Learn by her noble stomach to esteem
> Penury plenty in extremest dearth;
> Who, when she saw her foragement bereft,
> Pined not in melancholy or childish fear,
> But as brave minds are strongest in extremes,
> So she, redoubling her former force,
> Ranged through the woods, and rent the breeding vaults
> Of proudest savages, to save herself;
> Feed then and faint not, fair Calipolis.
> For rather than fierce famine shall prevail
> To gnaw thy entrails with her thorny teeth,
> The conquering lioness shall attend on thee,
> And lay huge heaps of slaughtered carcases,
> As bulwarks in her way, to keep her back.
> I will provide thee of a princely osprey,
> That, as she flieth over fish in pools,
> The fish shall turn their glistening bellies up,
> And thou shalt take thy liberal choice of all
> Jove's stately bird, with wide commanding wings,
> Shall hover still about thy princely head,
> And beat down fowl by shoals into thy lap:
> Feed then, and faint not, fair Calipolis.[1]

Imaginative rants of this kind brought into fashion, among the bullies, braggarts, and humourists, who frequented the theatre, a canting heroic style of ordinary conversation, as may be seen from Dekker's imitation of it in the Simon Eyre of the *Shoemaker's Holiday;* the language of the "Captain" in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster;* as well as from the ridicule of Shakespeare in the characters of Nym and Pistol, and the satire of Ben Jonson in the person of Tucca. The mastery which Peele

[1] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 428.

obtained over the audience, by what Greene calls the "bombasting out of blank verse," shows him to have been, in a sense, a master of dramatic style; and his knowledge of the sensuous effects, half musical, half pictorial, that can be produced by a harmonious combination of words and images bordering on nonsense, is illustrated in the lyrical opening of his *David and Bethsabe*:—

> Hot sun, cool fire, tempered with sweet air,
> Black shade, fair nurse, shadow my white hair;
> Shine, sun, burn, fire; breathe air, and ease me;
> Black shade, fair nurse, shroud me and please me.
> Shadow, my sweet nurse, keep me from burning;
> Make not my glad cause cause of my mourning.
> Let not my beauty's fire
> Inflame unstaid desire,
> Nor pierce any bright eye
> That wandereth lightly.
>
> BETHSABE. Come, gentle Zephyr, tricked with those perfumes
> That erst in Eden sweetened Adam's love,
> And stroke my bosom with thy silken fan:
> This shade, sun-proof, is yet no proof for thee:
> Thy body, smoother than the waveless spring,
> And purer than the substance of the same,
> Can creep through that his lances cannot pierce:
> Thou and thy sister, soft and sacred air,
> Goddess of life and governess of health,
> Keep every fountain fresh and arbour sweet:
> No brazen gate her passage can repulse,
> Nor bushy thicket bar thy subtle breath;
> Then deck thee with thy loose delightsome robes,
> And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes,
> To play the wanton with us through the leaves.[1]

But admirably as Peele's lyric style was adapted for the purposes of stage rhetoric, he lacked the spiritual imagination and the knowledge of character required for the production of a great drama. He was inferior in certain points, as I have said, both to Marlowe and Greene; and he was no more able than either of his companions to convert romantic materials into an organic form. He fails precisely for the same reasons that caused them to fail; as may be seen from his tragedy entitled

[1] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 463.

The Battle of Alcazar. The scheme of this play was evidently suggested by *Tamburlaine.* It represents the death of three kings, and of a valiant Englishman, Stukeley, allies of Muly Mahamet, usurping Sultan of Morocco,—incidents that actually occurred in the early part of Elizabeth's reign. The obvious motive of the dramatist is to present to the spectators various scenes of war and adv nture, interesting their imagination in the fortunes of one of their own countrymen, transporting it to distant scenes, and exalting it by speeches of stirring rhetoric. But there is no person in the play conceived in the same lyrical spirit as Marlowe's Tamburlaine; hence to work out the action the poet has to fall back on the machinery of the ancient stage. At the opening of each act he introduces a "Presenter," who describes the progress of affairs. The first act is preceded by a Dumb Show, representing the series of events out of which the initial situation in the play has arisen. This pageant is interpreted to the spectators by the Presenter. Before the second act the same indispensable personage speaks as follows:—

> Now war begins his rage and ruthless reign,
> And Nemesis, with bloody whip in hand,
> Thunders for vengeance on the Negro Moor;
> Nor may the silence of this speechless night,
> Dire architect of murders and misdeeds,
> Of tragedies and tragic tyrannies,
> Hide or contain the barbarous cruelty
> Of this usurper to his progeny.
> [*Three ghosts within cry* Vindicta.][1]
> Etc. Etc. Etc.

Ghosts, presenters and ranting rhetoric—of a much coarser kind than Peele's—are found in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy.* But Kyd, vulgar as he was, had a truer idea of the structure necessary for a drama than any of his immediate associates. His masterpiece has an intelligibie and stirring plot. The Induction, in which Revenge proposes to exhibit the action of the play to the ghost of Andrea, seems to be a dramatic rendering (perhaps.

[1] Greene and Peele's *Works* (Dyce), p. 425.

suggested by the ghost of Atreus in the *Thyestes* of Seneca) of the epic scheme employed, in *The Mirror of Magistrates*, by Higgins, who makes the ghosts of different historic personages, assembled in the halls of Morpheus, relate their tragic fortunes. As far as the mere form of the play goes, the labyrinth of revenge, through which the action proceeds, is constructed with a greater knowledge of stage effect than Marlowe's *Jew of Malta;* but in the representation of character Kyd is greatly inferior to his master.

The work of all the early Romantic dramatists deserves the appreciative study of every lover of art and literature. The links which connect them with the ancient drama ; the genius and daring with which they naturalised on the stage the imitation of purely secular action ; the difficulties they encountered in the construction of appropriate dramatic forms ; the lyric freshness and *naïveté* of their invention,—all this secures for the poetry of Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Kyd an interest and sympathy hardly aroused by the more elaborate efforts of some of their late successors. Still more interesting is it as marking the starting-point of Shakespeare's dramatic invention. Shakespeare was first the disciple of these dramatists, afterwards their rival, finally their conqueror in the public esteem. There is no evidence to show that he ever made one of the society which Greene addresses in his *Repentance*, or that he sympathised with its riots ; but it is evident from his early dramas that he was of the school of Marlowe ; and the vein of Italian thinking which he derived from that poet formed an element of his conception so long as he continued to write for the stage. Within the rude limits marked out by his predecessor's experiments he went on to develop his own perfection ; and *The Jew of Malta*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, *Edward I.*, and *The Spanish Tragedy* shine with a reflected glory, when we consider them as preparing the way for *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Henry IV.*, and *Hamlet*.

CHAPTER II

THE LYRICAL ELEMENT IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

"SHAKESPEARE's characters (says Pope, in an admirable criticism) are so much Nature herself, that 'tis a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image; each picture, like a mock rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will upon comparison be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character we must add the wonderful preservation of it, which is such throughout his plays, that, had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker."[1]

Universality of idea, individuality of character—these, combined, are doubtless the qualities which distinguish the style of Shakespeare from that of every other poet. But when we seek for the cause of this effect, when we strive to penetrate the thought of the dramatist, to discover the motive of his conceptions, to fathom the meaning of his profound expressions, we at once feel ourselves to be face to face with a mystery. Two opposite schools of interpretation, in particular, have developed themselves, the German and the English, each equally confident and equally contemptuous of the method of the other; the former explaining the character of Shakespeare's plays by a supposed system of inward philosophy; the latter by

[1] *Preface to Shakespeare*, Pope's Works (Elwin and Courthope), x. 535.

the external analysis of his dramatic work. The Germans have asserted the superiority of their criticism with a strange arrogance; Gervinus, for example, contends that, till he was interpreted by Lessing, Shakespeare was never properly understood;[1] and undoubtedly the Germans have thrown a fresh and strong light on the subject. In the beginning of the present century, Augustus Schlegel, perceiving that it was uncritical to apply to the work of Shakespeare an æsthetic test based on the purely conventional rules of the French stage, set himself to divine the actual artistic motives of the English poet. Of his general line of thought I have already spoken; the confidence with which he applied his *a priori* system of interpretation to the dramas of Shakespeare may be inferred from the following passage:—

> In an essay on *Romeo and Juliet*, written a number of years ago, I went through the whole of the scenes in their order, and demonstrated the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole; I showed why such a particular circle of characters and relations was placed around the two lovers; I explained the signification of the mirth here and there scattered, and justified the use of the occasional heightening given to the poetical colours. From all this it seemed to follow unquestionably that with the exception of a few witticisms now become unintelligible or foreign to the present taste, nothing could be taken away, nothing added, nothing otherwise arranged, without mutilating and disfiguring the perfect work.[2]

Other German exponents of "æsthetic" criticism followed in the steps of Schlegel, notably Gervinus and Ulrici, the latter of whom carried the *a priori* method to the farthest possible extreme, on a principle which may be cited as characteristic of the school:—

> It thus becomes necessary that there should be a definite substance of thought for that inner unity in the formation and construction of every drama; the various conceptions of the one general view which life acquires in the poetic imagination, according to the different standpoints, are substantially the ideas which guided Shakespeare in his artistic activity; they are the nominative central thoughts, or, as Goethe says, "the ideas to

[1] Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries* (Bunning's Translation), vol. i. p. 18.
[2] Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, p. 361.

which he referred all the details." Goethe, even "old" Goethe, could not possibly have found such ideas in Shakespeare's poems, had he not himself been conscious that he too, like every poet, had allowed himself to be guided by ideas in this sense.[1]

That every great poet imitates Nature, according to a regular system and design in his own mind, is a truth which will of course be universally recognised. But that any critic can discover what this is by his own intuition, and without an accurate knowledge of the character of the nation to which the poet belongs, or of the ways of thinking peculiar to the age in which he lived, is by no means so clear. The German critics seem to be for the most part unaware that, in their interpretation of Shakespeare's plays, they are dealing with an English author, whose mind is not made on the German pattern. The consequence is, as any Englishman can see, that their account of his plays is often not only wrong, but ridiculous. Listen, for example, to what Gervinus says about Launce and his dog in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*:—

> A deeper sense still have the stories of the rough Launce and his dog Crab, the very scenes which undoubtedly occur to the gentler reader as most offensive. To the silly semi-brute fellow, who sympathises with his beast almost more than with man, his dog is his best friend. He has suffered stripes for him, he has taken his faults upon himself, and has been willing to sacrifice everything to him. At last self-sacrificing, like Valentine and Julia, even this friend himself he will resign, his best possession he will abandon, to do a service to his master. With this capacity for sacrifice, this simple child of Nature is placed by the side of that splendid model of manly endowments, Proteus, who, self-seeking, betrayed friend and lover. And thus this fine relation of the lower to the higher parts of the piece is so skilfully concealed by the removal of all moralising from the action, that the cultivated examiner of the piece finds the objective effect of the action in no wise disturbed, while the groundling of the pit tastes unimpeded his pure delight in common nature.[2]

Gervinus, it is plain, has not the least suspicion that Shakespeare, as a dramatist, may have had to take into

[1] Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art* (Bohn's Edition), Preface p. x.
[2] Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries*, vol. i. p. 226.

account the rude taste of his audience, which asked for such episodes of purely realistic imitation as that of Launce and his dog, quite independently of the main plot of the play. Ulrici's interpretation of the moral meaning in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is much of the same kind:—

> In the first place it is self-evident that the play is based upon the comic view of life, that is to say, upon Shakespeare's idea of comedy. This is here expressed without reserve and in the clearest manner possible, in so far as it is not only in particular cases that the maddest freaks of accident come into conflict with human capriciousness, folly and perversity, thus thwarting one another in turn, but that the principal spheres of life are made mutually to parody one another in mirthful irony. This last feature distinguishes *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* from other comedies. Theseus and Hippolyta appear obviously to represent the grand, heroic, historical side of human nature. In place, however, of maintaining their greatness, power and dignity, it is exhibited as spent in the every-day occurrence of a marriage, which can claim no greater significance than it possesses for ordinary mortals; their heroic greatness parodies itself inasmuch as it appears to exist for no other purpose than to be married in suitable fashion. The band of mechanics—the carpenter, joiner, weaver, bellows-mender and tinker—in contrast to the above higher regions of existence, represent the lowest sphere in the full prose of everyday life. But even they—in place of remaining in their own sphere and station, where they are fully justified, and even somewhat poetical—force themselves into the domain of the tragic muse, and accordingly not merely exhibit themselves in an exceedingly ludicrous light, but are, as it were, a parody on themselves, as well as on the higher sphere of the tragic and heroic. Midway between these two extremes stand the two loving couples who belong to the middle stratum of human society. But in place of endeavouring to regard life from its inner and central point—in accordance with their position—they also lose themselves in the fantastic play of their own selfish love, and thus they too are a parody on themselves and their station in life.[1]

Not only does the incredible lack of humour, betrayed in criticisms like these, make it impossible that the commentators should be in sympathy with Shakespeare, but it is plain, as I shall try to show hereafter, that the

[1] Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art* (Bohn), vol. ii. p. 72.

character of plot and under-plot in Shakespeare's plays was determined by dramatic considerations of a kind very different from what is supposed by Gervinus and Ulrici. It is perhaps not wonderful that, considering the contempt with which the German critics have spoken of every method of interpreting Shakespeare but their own, their commentaries should have been handled somewhat roughly by the opposite school.

Not a little of the Shakespearean criticism of this kind that exists (says Grant White, an excellent American editor of Shakespeare) is the mere result of an effort to say something fine about what needs no gilding, no such prism play of light to enhance or bring out its beauties. I will not except from these remarks much of what Coleridge himself has written about Shakespeare. But the German critics whom he emulated are worse than he is. Avoid them. The German pretence that Germans have taught us folk of English blood and speech to understand Shakespeare is the most absurd and arrogant that could be set up. Shakespeare owes them nothing, and we have received from them little more than some maundering mystification and much ponderous platitude.[1]

White himself recommended the reader to study Shakespeare in a good text and without notes, and his description of Shakespeare's "motives" in the construction of *Romeo and Juliet* may be usefully contrasted with that of Schlegel:—

Shakespeare merely dramatised the old ballad to make a play to please his audience, just as the hack playwright might to-day who was engaged by the manager to do a like task. It merely happened that he was William Shakespeare, and had a peculiar way of doing such things. As to a moral, plainly nothing was further from Shakespeare's thoughts. The tragedy is hardly tragic, but rather a dramatic love-poem with a sad ending.[2]

This opinion rushes into as violent an extreme in one direction as that of Schlegel and his German followers in the other. If Shakespeare had written like any "hack playwright," if, like so many of the dramatists of his time, —Beaumont and Fletcher, for example—he had thought solely of pleasing the audience before him in the theatre

[1] *Studies in Shakespeare*, by Richard Grant White, pp. 53, 54.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 36.

then it is certain that his characters would have had something of an abstract air; they would have lacked that intense individual life which Pope speaks of, and which not only keeps them alive in the imagination of the reader, but makes it still possible to represent them upon the stage. These ideal creations would not have convinced us so immediately as they now do of their truth and reality; however the intellect might have apprehended the poet's meaning, the heart would have remained untouched by a feeling of its truth; nor would a thousand of Shakespeare's sentiments and images have become a spiritual part of every community which speaks the English tongue. The Germans are right in ascribing to Shakespeare "the general view which life acquires in the poetic imagination"; they are wrong only in thinking that the view of life which he held can be discovered *a priori* by their own metaphysical systems. Shakespeare, it is evident, expressed his personal emotions through the mouth of the ideal persons he created. "We see him," says Hallam, "not in himself but in a reflex image, from the objectivity in which he was manifested: he is Falstaff, and Mercutio, and Malvolio, and Jaques, and Portia, and Imogen, and Lear, and Othello."[1] And from this it seems necessarily to follow that, if we would understand the whole significance of these characters, and feel to the full the pathos, the humour, the truth of the situations in which they play their part, we must not only consider them abstractedly in themselves, but also be able to divine something of the character and feelings of their creator.

A large debt of gratitude is therefore due from all lovers of Shakespeare to those who, like Mr. Halliwell-Phillips—the father of modern Shakespearean biography—Professor Dowden, and Dr. Brandes, have busied themselves with collecting all the facts that can be discovered relating to the life of the poet. The crown of their labours has been reached in the recent admirable volume on the subject produced by Mr. Sidney Lee. It may safely be decided that

[1] *Literary History* (1860), vol. ii. p. 276.

the results of his industry and research are exhaustive, and that it is in the highest degree improbable that posterity will ever possess larger material than ourselves for judging the character of the greatest of poets; the critical conclusions drawn by Mr. Lee from his facts are of course open to question.

The sources of our biographical knowledge are of two kinds: the external records that remain of Shakespeare's life and actions, and the autobiographical record that he has himself left us of his feelings. With regard to the former, it can hardly be said that information has been advanced much beyond the point to which it was brought by the careful investigation of Mr Halliwell - Phillips. William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon on the 22nd or 23rd of April 1564, being the son of John Shakespeare and Mary, his wife, who was the daughter of Robert Arden, a yeoman of gentle family in the neighbourhood of Stratford. His father appears to have been a glover and dealer in corn and wool, probably well-inclined to the ancient religion, since his name is on the list of suspected recusants after the penal legislation of 1581. William was perhaps sent to the Free School at Stratford in 1571, and would doubtless have been there taught thoroughly the rudiments of Latin and Greek. According to the story communicated by Betterton to Rowe he was brought up to the wool-trade. Aubrey says that he exercised his father's trade, and maintains this to have been a butcher's. In November 1582 he entered into a bond in anticipation of his marriage with Anne or Agnes Hathaway, daughter of a neighbouring farmer; and on May 26, 1583, was born his eldest daughter, Susanna. Twins, Hamnet (who died in 1596) and Judith, were afterwards born to him in February 1585. Between 1585 and 1588 he was obliged to leave Stratford, Rowe says, in consequence of having been engaged in deer-stealing in the park of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote; and though this story rests on slight authority it seems certain that in *The Second Part of Henry IV.* Shakespeare intended to satirise some one of the name of Lucy in the person of Justice Shallow.

from fear of the animosity of Sir Thomas or some other reason, Shakespeare, having determined to seek his livelihood in London, did not return to his home in Stratford for a long time, though he is said to have visited his family there once a year.

According to the tradition of Davenant, he at first supported himself by holding horses at the door of the theatres; another report says that he became a prompter's attendant, his duty being "to give the performers notice to be ready to enter as often as the business of the play required their appearance on the stage." At what date he began his career as an actor or a playwright is uncertain; but as we may, in my opinion, confidently assign to him the authorship of *Titus Andronicus*, and may infer from Ben Jonson's expressions that this play was a work of nearly the same date as *The Spanish Tragedy*, it is reasonable to conclude that he was writing for the stage before 1590. We know for certain, from Green's testimony, that he had established a high reputation as a dramatist in 1592. After this date many circumstances attest his rapid advance in prosperity and position. In 1593 his *Venus and Adonis*, which he calls "the first heir of my invention," is dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, one of the most influential of Elizabeth's courtiers, while his Sonnets, whoever may have been the person to whom they were addressed, show the closeness of his companionship with men of high birth and station. To Southampton he dedicated in 1594 his *Rape of Lucrece*, and in this year he acted before the Queen, who, as we know from Ben Jonson's memorial lines, always held him in the highest esteem. Coat armour was granted to his father, John Shakespeare, in October 1596, no doubt through his influence; in 1597 he bought New Place, a large house with an acre of land in the town of Stratford. In 1599 he was admitted to a share in the profits of the Globe Theatre, and these were so considerable as to enable him in 1602, besides purchasing 107 acres of land at Stratford, to enlarge the borders of New Place. He also made money

by the lease of tithes and by dealing in malt. Continuing to write steadily for the stage up to 1610 or 1611, he retired, probably about that date, to Stratford, where he lived till his death on April 23 (perhaps his birthday), 1616.

With a life superficially so prosperous, and so devoid of incident deserving of record, it would be difficult indeed to connect dramas the most varied and versatile, the most profound and impassioned, that the world possesses, had not the poet himself partially lifted the veil, and revealed to us in his Sonnets glimpses at least of his deepest emotions. We have no external evidence as to the date at which these poems were written: to judge from the Sonnets themselves they were the work of different periods of Shakespeare's life. Some of them were in existence in 1598, when Meres mentions among his other productions his "Sugred Sonnets"; and two of them (cxxxviii., cxliv.) were surreptitiously included by the printer Jaggard in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, a poetical miscellany published in 1599. The entire collection was not printed till 1609, when it was issued by T. T. (Thomas Thorpe), with a dedication to Mr. W. H., "the onlie begetter of these insuing Sonnets." The Sonnets (with a few omissions) were afterwards included in a volume containing, among other compositions, "Poems by Wil. Shakespeare," published by Benson in 1640; the order in which they were originally arranged being altered by the editor.

They have two main aspects of interest: one personal, the other poetical; they apparently contain direct references to facts and individuals; they seem to express deep and sincere emotions. But on closer examination we find ourselves perplexed by questions whether the personal references are real or fictitious, and, if real, who are the persons referred to; how far the feelings supposed in them are genuine, and, if genuine at all, what allowance is to be made for the strong element of imagination that mingles itself with reality. Just as has happened to the critics of Shakespeare's plays, opposite schools of

interpretation have arisen, each developing one aspect of the case as if it excluded the other: the Sonnets have been construed by one party as literal records of autobiographical fact, by the other as exercises of abstract and metaphysical imagination. Mr. Lee sees that the truth probably lies between the two extremes; and that the right interpretation of the Sonnets must depend upon the exercise of critical tact and perception. His survey of the whole question brings the points at issue into clear perspective; and I shall content myself with a brief summary of the opinions advanced on either side, concluding with my own opinion of the net result of the controversy.

First with regard to the persons referred to in the Sonnets. The majority of modern critics identify Mr. W. H. with William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke, but a considerable minority, among whom is Mr. Lee, ascribe the inspiration to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. For seventy years, however, after their first publication, the Sonnets were supposed to be written to a woman; and this long tradition has suggested to some of the commentators the most surprising hypotheses. G. Chalmers imagined that they were addressed to Queen Elizabeth;[1] H. W. Hudson that many of them were inspired by Anne Hathaway;[2] Coleridge confessed that it seemed to him "that the Sonnets could only have come from a man deeply in love, and in love with a woman."[3] Since it was impossible that the craze that Bacon was the author of Shakespeare's works should not infect the interpretation of the Sonnets, one critic is of opinion that these poems "were written by Bacon to be read by William Herbert to the Queen, and thereby win back her regard for the offending truant, Essex. Elizabeth was a black beauty, not literally, but as hostile in mind and will to Essex."[4] In order to show his originality

[1] *Apology for the Believers in the Shakespeare Papers*, 1797.
[2] *Shakespeare, his Life, Art, and Character*, p. 24.
[3] *Table Talk*, p. 245.
[4] William Thomson, *The Renascence Drama*, p. 133, cited in Dowden's edition of Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 106.

another divines that these poems were addressed by Shakespeare to his son—an illegitimate one; and the proof of this is to be found in the lines:—

> Even so my *Sun* one early morn did shine
> With all triumphant splendour on my brow.[1]

The palm for profound divination must be awarded to Herr Barnstorff, a German critic, who concludes that the object of Shakespeare's idolatry, Mr. W. H., was no other than "William Himself."[2]

Of the other persons alluded to in the Sonnets, the rival poet is by some supposed, on grounds not altogether unreasonable, to be Samuel Daniel;[3] who was a pupil of Dr. Dee, and a believer in judicial astrology, and who in 1602 dedicated his *Defence of Ryme* to Lord Pembroke; but a new claimant for the honour was put forward in 1874 by the late Professor Minto, namely George Chapman. The sole foundation for this theory is in the lines:—

> No, neither he, nor his compeers by night,
> Giving him aid, my verse astonished,
> He, nor that affable familiar ghost
> Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
> As victors of my silence cannot boast.

According to Professor Minto these words are to be interpreted in connection with two passages in Chapman's works, one in his *Shadow of Night*, which explains the word "compeers by night":—

> All you possessed with indepressed spirits,
> Endued with nimble and aspiring wits,
> Come, consecrate with me to sacred night
> Your whole endeavours, and detest the light:—

and the other in the Dedication to that poem, which explains the word "familiar":—

> Now what a supererogation in wit this is, to think Skill so mightily pierced with their loves that she should prostitutely show them her secrets, when she will scarcely be looked upon

[1] G. Travers Smith, *Victorian Review* for December 1880.
[2] Schlüssel zu Shakspeare's Sonetten. D. Barnstorff, 1860.
[3] James Boaden in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1832.

by others but with invocation, fasting, watching, yea, not without having drops of their souls like a heavenly familiar."[1]

Conjecture naturally becomes most riotous over the last twenty-five Sonnets. Mr. Gerald Massey convinced himself that while the first portion of the Sonnets was written by Shakespeare in the assumed person of the Earl of Southampton to express the feeling of the latter for Dorothy Vernon, of whom he is known to have been enamoured;[2] the second series was in like manner composed for Lord Pembroke as the admirer of Lady Rich. I know not whether any person besides Mr. Massey has conceived such a thing to be possible; but of recent years another theory as to the person of the "woman coloured ill" has been advanced with equal confidence, and appears to depend upon the following chain of reasoning. Mr. W. H. *may* be Mr. William Herbert, who in 1601 became Earl of Pembroke. The Earl of Pembroke appears, from a document without a date, to have been "committed to the fleet," in consequence of an intrigue with a court lady, Mrs. Mary Fitton. Mrs. Fitton's marble bust is coloured brown, and she was acquainted with an actor in the same company as Shakespeare; therefore she was probably acquainted with Shakespeare himself, and is the person with "raven-black" brows and eyes referred to in Sonnet cxxvii.; hence she may be confidently identified as the "causa belli" between Shakespeare and the Earl of Pembroke alluded to in Sonnets xxxiii.-xxxv., and xl.-xlii.[3]

All industrious inquiry into matters relating to a man so profoundly interesting to the world as Shakespeare is praiseworthy, but interpretation of this kind tends to introduce an element of vulgar prose into some of the most exquisite of human compositions. Nor is it wonderful that, in horror of such realism, some critics should have recoiled into exactly the opposite extreme. Since

[1] *Characteristics of English Poets from Chaucer to Shirley* (1874).
[2] *Shakespeare's Sonnets never before Interpreted*, London, 1866.
[3] *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (T. Tyler), pp. 56-92.

the appearance of the *Vita Nuova*, the first European work of this class, there has never been a lack of critics to insist that Dante's feelings were *entirely* fictitious, and that his love for Beatrice Portinari had no real existence. This principle of criticism has been frequently applied to Shakespeare's Sonnets. Nathan Drake, while identifying Mr. W. H. with the Earl of Southampton, thinks that the Sonnets from cxxvii.-clii. were not written to a real person. Charles Knight holds that some of the Sonnets, such as "*that* (*sic*) urging a friend to marry, and that (*sic*) complaining of the robbery of a mistress, are probably fictions in the Italian style." Many of the German commentators are on the same side. Herr Barnstorff, as I have said, believes Shakespeare to have written the Sonnets to himself. N. Delius concludes them to be poems of the fancy, "in which Shakespeare treats non-dramatically some of the themes treated in the plays and in *Venus and Adonis*." Karl Elze and E. Stengel also interpret them as "exercises of the fancy, written for the amusement of friends." Several English and American critics have taken a similar view, but find an allegorical sense running through the lines. J. A. Heraud extracts from the Sonnets a political and religious allegory. E. Hitchcock thinks that they are a reflection of the poet's mind in relation to beauty. "This spirit," he says, "has two sides, a masculine known as the reason, Shakespeare's better angel of Sonnet cxliv.; and a feminine, the 'woman coloured ill,' *i.e.* what is popularly known as the affections." The same view has been expanded with great ability by R. Simpson, who dwells on a side of the question frequently illustrated in the first two volumes of this History, namely, the ideal treatment of love in the Middle Ages. Finally, H. Brown comes to the somewhat eccentric conclusion that the Sonnets are intended to be a satire on the sonneteering fashion of Shakespeare's day.[1]

Each of these opposing schools is represented in the

[1] All the theories that have been put forward on this subject may be found in a condensed form in Mr. Dowden's admirable edition of the Sonnets (1881), pp. 1-110.

two valuable biographies to which I have before referred. Dr. Brandes, who develops the ingenious investigations of Mr. Thomas Tyler, is so much impressed with the reality of the emotions expressed in the Sonnets, that he takes these poems as the foundation for a connected biographical narrative; Mr. Lee is so incredulous of the supposed matter of fact in them, that he questions the sincerity of their feeling. Dr. Brandes writes as if the identity of the person to whom the Sonnets are addressed had been positively established. "The view," he says, "that Pembroke was the hero of the Sonnets has gradually made its way, and is now shared by the best critics (such as Dowden), while it has received, as it were, its final confirmation in the acute and often convincing critical observations contained in Mr. Thomas Tyler's book on the Sonnets, published in 1890."[1] He is equally sure about the rival poet alluded to by Shakespeare. "Chapman (*as Professor Minto succeeded in establishing*) is clearly the rival poet who paid court to Pembroke."[2] The "woman coloured ill" is, beyond doubt, in Dr. Brandes' mind, the Mrs. Mary Fitton discovered by Mr. Tyler.[3] All these leading points being "established," it follows of course that the story of intrigue suggested by the Sonnets is to be literally believed; and Dr. Brandes feels himself justified in making the following inference about Shakespeare and his enchantress:—

> She must have made the acquaintance of the poet and player, then thirty years old, at earlier court entertainments. Who can doubt that it was she, with her high position and daring spirit, who made the first advances?

To all these supposed "facts" Mr. Lee applies a severely negative test. He is not, I think, very successful in proving that Pembroke *could* not have been the person to whom the Sonnets were written; but he argues that "Mr. W. H.," to whom the Sonnets are dedicated, is neither William Herbert nor Henry Wriothesley. He ex-

[1] Brandes, *William Shakespeare* (English Translation), vol. i. p. 316.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 324. [3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 330.

poses very successfully the extremely flimsy evidence on which Chapman has been accepted as the rival poet; he absolutely demolishes the theory that the "woman coloured ill" was Mrs. Fitton by proving from existing portraits that the latter was not dark but fair. Finally, he concludes:—

> The sole biographical inference deducible from the Sonnets is that, at one time in his career, Shakespeare disdained no weapon of flattery in an endeavour to monopolise the bountiful patronage of a young man of rank. External evidence agrees with internal evidence in indentifying the belauded patron with the Earl of Southampton, and the real value to a biographer of Shakespeare's Sonnets is the corroboration they offer of the ancient tradition that the Earl of Southampton, to whom his two narrative poems were openly dedicated, gave Shakespeare at an early period of his career help and encouragement.[1]

I cannot go all lengths with either of these antagonistic schools of biography: in one direction I find myself sharing, indeed exceeding, the scepticism of Mr. Lee, in another the faith of Mr. Tyler and Dr. Brandes. I am quite ready to follow Mr. Lee in all his negative conclusions as to the persons alluded to; it is another thing when he puts forward his positive creed. The only new evidence he has produced, in favour of Southampton being the object of the poet's idolatry, is a correspondence between the portraits of that Earl and certain expressions used in the Sonnets; on the other hand, he has himself sought to destroy one of the arguments on which Southampton's claims were originally grounded, by maintaining that "Mr. W. H." is Mr. William Hall. Of this suggestion I will merely say that, even if "onlie begetter" could be proved to mean "sole procurer," the idea of Thomas Thorpe, the piratical publisher of the Sonnets, dedicating them to the knavish agent who stole them, seems almost too humorous to be probable. Nor can I see why Mr. Lee, not content with showing that Chapman is not likely to have been the rival poet, should have attempted to fill the vacant place with so grotesque a substitute as Barnabe Barnes. Even if any one thinks it

[1] *A Life of William Shakespeare* (3rd edition), p. 125

probable that a poet of Shakespeare's transcendent genius should have been alarmed by the rivalry of the author of *Parthenophil and Parthenope*, a characteristic specimen of whose "great verse" I have given in an earlier volume.[1] It has not been suggested that the latter was in the habit of receiving his inspiration from any "affable familiar ghost."

Whether Pembroke, or Southampton, or some third person, was the friend addressed in the Sonnets, is in my opinion a matter of very little moment; but the question whether the feelings expressed in the Sonnets are sincere or fictitious is all important for the interpretation of Shakespeare's dramatic works. Mr. Lee holds them to be purely poetical. With the general principle on which he has based this opinion I cordially agree. I have shown over and over again in the course of my narrative, that when the poets of the Middle Ages, who derive their imagery from the Courts of Love, express themselves in amorous terms, their compositions can be construed correctly only by those who are familiar with the conventional language they employ. I have shown further that, as the ages of chivalry decayed, this language, which at one time reflected a certain ardour and reality of social sentiment, grew cold and mechanical, so that there is a wide difference between the enthusiasm with which Petrarch, for example, celebrates Laura, and the spirit in which Surrey dwells on the beauties of the Fair Geraldine. Finally, I have described the depths of decline into which the love sonnet had sunk in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, and have pointed out that, even in the interpretation of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, there can be no greater mistake than to regard that series of sonnets as recording an actual history of love in the modern sense of the word.

But while I hold that all mediaeval sonnets must be interpreted in the spirit which gave them birth, I am of opinion that Mr. Lee, in his criticism of Shakespeare's Sonnets, has pressed a sound principle too logically to its conclusion, and without reference to the essential character of the poems he is judging. Doubtless it may be shown,

[1] See vol. ii. p. 304.

taking lines and phrases separately, that there was a good deal in common between Shakespeare and those whom Mr. Lee well calls the "modish sonneteers" of the day; that, like them, he often expressed himself in the conventional manner proper to the history of the sonnet; and that he pushed to an extreme its subtle conceits, and exaggerated its figurative language, till it became obscure, and often unintelligible. But it seems to me strange that any one, with a sense of poetry, after comparing Shakespeare's Sonnets, I will not say with those of poetasters like Watson and Barnes, or (to take a somewhat higher flight) with those of Giles Fletcher and Constable, but even with the work of men of fine taste and judgment, such as Daniel and Drayton, should conclude that the cold, conventional, mechanical compositions of these poets proceeded from the same source of inspiration as sonnets like those beginning "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought," or "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame," or "Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth." In poems such as these most lovers of poetry will feel with Wordsworth that Shakespeare "unlocked his heart." They will decide with Hallam: "They express not only real but intense emotions of the heart"; so real, so intense, indeed, that some may even share Hallam's wish that they had never been written. Shakespeare seems in them to say with Hamlet:—

> Doubt thou the stars are fire;
> Doubt that the sun doth move;
> Doubt truth to be a liar;
> But never doubt I love.

On this point I shall say more presently. Meantime, to proceed with Mr. Lee, it seems to me that his logic has not only made him insensible to the depth of the personal feeling in Shakespeare's Sonnets, but has left us without any key to the meaning of the very particular allusions made in so many of them. Poetry does not create *in vacuo*; it is set in motion by real and external objects. It is not to be supposed that Dante and Petrarch could have written as they did if they had not been inspired by

a genuine personal affection of some kind. Even *Astrophel and Stella* was grounded on a combination of real circumstances; and the Sonnets of Shakespeare flow from a far deeper source of imagination and emotion than those of Sidney. The person to whom they are addressed must have been a living person, and must have been capable of understanding, without explanation from the author, the poet's allusions, many of which seem perfectly pointless if they be regarded as mere fictions. Who can doubt that, when Shakespeare composed Sonnet cxxviii., he had experienced the feelings he describes in listening to a real woman playing on the virginals? What possible point can there have been in inventing "for the amusement of friends" such a situation as that recorded in Sonnets xxxiv., xxxv., xl.-xlii.? Is it to be supposed that the friend of the poet did not know what was meant by the allusion to the particular "spirit taught by spirits to write"? Or that there was no significant meaning in the lapse of time described in Sonnet civ.?—

> To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
> For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
> Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold
> Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,
> Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turned
> In process of the seasons have I seen,
> Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned,
> Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

Is this the language of a *protégé* to a patron? Is it credible that such lines were merely a "weapon of flattery," meant "to monopolise the bountiful patronage of a young man of rank"; or that the actual source of their inspiration was a dull poem, treating the subject of love in the ordinary mechanical way, and entitled *Willobie his Avisa?* Surely not.

My belief is that, in his Sonnets, Shakespeare was not, like so many of his contemporaries, elaborating a cold system of poetical flattery, but was giving expression to a profound view of life, the result partly of observation and reflection about men and things, partly of personal ex-

perience and emotion; that this view took fresh form and colour at different stages of his career; that its lyrical character may be detected running, as a thread, not only through the Sonnets themselves, but through his epic and dramatic work; whereby, when these different classes of composition are compared with each other, a certain insight may be obtained into his poetical motives. At the same time the expression of these general and personal feelings is greatly modified by the traditions of the poetical form which Shakespeare employed, so that, in interpreting his sentiment, we have always to keep in mind the vein of thought peculiar to the sonnet from the earliest ages, and the changes effected in its character by the altering moods of society at large.

The sonnet had come down to Shakespeare, with but little alteration in its essential features, from the remote days of Guido Cavalcanti. The far-off cradle of its spirit is the *Phædrus* of Plato, in which the physical Eros is represented as the starting-point of the metaphysical, or intellectual, love which reveals to the mind the highest idea of beauty. By channels equally intricate and obscure this stream of sentiment reached the age of the troubadours, mingling itself on the way with two tributaries, the Teutonic inclination to woman-worship, intensified by the adoration of the Virgin Mary, and the allegorical system of Scripture interpretation, employed by the Catholic Church. In this way Plato's general conception of physical, as the stepping-stone to metaphysical, love, was personified in some particular woman, Beatrice or another, who again became the symbol of a higher spiritual idea, such as we find in Dante's description of the Blessed Company of Saints, seen in the heaven of the first movement. The Christianised idea of Plato is embodied in the words of Beatrice, addressed to Dante respecting the spiritual inferences to be drawn from material images: "Thus it is that it is necessary to speak to your wit, because it is only from an object of sense that it apprehends what it afterwards makes worthy of the understanding."

So long as the mediæval genius prevailed in literature, this apotheosis of a particular woman, associated with universal ideas of spiritual love, was an essential feature of the sonnet, though with a constant tendency to become mechanical and conventional. But with the growth of the Renaissance a new vein of sentiment made its appearance. The revival of classical learning carried back men's imagination to the fountain-head of allegorical poetry, and made them reflect, not only on what Plato had said about the connection between physical and intellectual love, but also on the enthusiastic nature of the friendship between man and man, which, among the nobler of the Greeks, was dignified with the name of love. When Shakespeare wrote—

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments—

he was speaking the language both of Plato and of many of the greatest of the Humanists in all countries of Europe. Moved by a kindred impulse Montaigne poured forth his feelings of enthusiastic friendship for Estienne de la Boetie, and Languet his affection for Philip Sidney in the letter which he wrote to thank him for his portrait.[1] Sir Thomas Browne, a late disciple of the same school, says:—

> I never yet cast a true affection on a woman, but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God. . . . There are three most mystical unions—two natures in one person, three persons in one nature, one soul in two bodies. For though, indeed, they be really divided, yet are they so united as they seem but one, and make rather a duality than two distinct souls.[2]

As the succession of sonnets in the *Vita Nuova* was, according to Dante's own account, determined by a series of real incidents, so the Sonnets of Shakespeare appear to reflect ideally a certain real and external situation, the key to which is found in Sonnet cxliv., one of those which were published by Jaggard in 1599:—

> Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
> Which like two spirits do suggest me still:
> The better angel is a man right fair,
> The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.

[1] Fox Bourne's *Sir Philip Sidney*, pp. 84-85.
[2] *Religio Medici*, Part ii. Sect. 5.

> To win me soon to hell, my female evil
> Tempteth my better angel from my side,
> And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
> Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
> And whether that my angel be turned fiend
> Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
> But being both from me, both to each friend,
> I guess one angel in another's hell:
> Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
> Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

Here, under the image of the Bonus Angelus and Malus Angelus of the Old Moralities, we have a very distinct suggestion of a real drama. The sketch of the situation corresponds with the twofold division of the Sonnets (Nos. i-cxxvii. being addressed to a man, and the rest to a woman), and also with the state of things suggested, on the one hand, in Sonnets xl.-xlii. and on the other, in Sonnets cxxxiii.-cxxxiv. At the same time, the two opposing angels appeal to opposite sides of the poet's own nature, and throughout the series the finest Sonnets are those in which Shakespeare links his addresses to the several *objects* of his love with ideas and feelings about the world in general. Whatever part he may *himself* have played in the drama, certain it is that the imaginary situation has a universal meaning, and moreover, the particular class of feeling, which he expresses in the Sonnets with such lyric intensity, is reproduced in his other poems both in an epic and a dramatic form. Accordingly, when we find in his tragedies or comedies ideal characters giving utterance to sentiments like those in the Sonnets, it is not unreasonable to conclude that we are in close contact with the nature of Shakespeare himself.

As regards the relation in which the poet stands to the person whom he esteems his Good Angel, it is plain that this friend occupies in many of the Sonnets the same kind of position which Dante, in the *Vita Nuova* and in the *Divine Comedy*, assigns to Beatrice. The situation described seems to be an ardent, but at the same time an unequal, friendship between a youth of high birth, beauty, and accomplishment, and a man comparatively

years and conscious of high genius, but of lower rank; and the autobiographic glimpses in the history reveal the impediments to "the marriage of true minds" caused by such external obstacles as the "fortune" attendant on the player's profession (Sonnet cxi.), the "vulgar scandal" of the world (Sonnet cxii.), and the light "humour" (Sonnet xcii.) and "wantonness" of youth (Sonnet xcvi.).

There are, I think, unmistakable traces that the Sonnets were composed at different periods, and that the order in which they were arranged in 1609 is not that in which they were originally written; a device which may well have been adopted by the poet to baffle the curiosity of the reading public. They seem to fall naturally into groups, but these are here and there so mixed as to make the line of thought appear discontinuous. The first seventeen, urging the youth to marry, are unconnected with those that immediately follow, and may have been written, as Grant White suggests, at the request of a mother. I should be inclined to conjecture that the second series opened with Sonnet xviii.; and that the latter part of it from No. cxxvii., together with Nos. xxxiv., xxxv., xl.-xlii., lxxxvii.-xcvi., and some of those that follow up to cxxvi., all of which evidently refer to one group of incidents, was written at a later date, after the poet had discovered that his friend was not that example of ideal perfection which he had been supposed by the idolatry of imagination.[1] In Sonnets xviii.-xxxii. he dwells with all the diversified monotony, characteristic of this class of poem, on his friend's image, and the motive of many of the Sonnets is a variation of the thought of earlier poets. Thus the idea of No. xxi. is borrowed from the Third Sonnet in *Astrophel and Stella;* No. xxii., describing how his heart lives in his friend's breast, seems to have been suggested by the First Sonnet in the *Vita Nuova;* the inability of love to express itself in words (Sonnet xxiii.) is a frequent subject of the Provençal

[1] Otherwise there is a distinct contradiction between Sonnet lxx.: "That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect," and Sonnet xli.: "Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits."

School, examples of which are to be found in Petrarch's Forty-first Sonnet, and Wyatt's translation of the same;[1] while the relation between lord and vassal (Sonnet xxvi.) is treated, though in a different manner, in Petrarch's well-known verses beginning, "Amor, che nel pensier mio vive e regna."[2] The intense personality of Shakespeare, however, runs through the entire group, and concentrating the thought mainly on the superiority of the ideal love to time and fortune, culminates thus beautifully:—

xxix

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

xxx

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste.
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

xxxi

Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead,

[1] Nott's edition of Surrey and Wyatt's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 8.
[2] Petrarch's Sonnets, Part i. 109.

And there reigns love and all love's loving parts,
And all those friends which I thought buried.
How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stol'n from mine eye
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things removed that hidden in thee lie!
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,
Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give;
That due of many now is thine alone:
Their images I loved I view in thee,
And thou, all they, hast all the all of me.

This is not the mood of Surrey or Sidney; it is not even the mood of Petrarch: its vein is kindred to that of Dante; nor could any man have written such lines except from the depths of his heart.

Omitting the Sonnets already alluded to, and one or two others which seem to have been mixed with them for the purpose of concealment (Nos. xxxiii.-xlii.), we come to a group (xliv.-lxi.) written apparently on the established theme, *verus amans sine intermissione coamantis imagine detinetur.*[1] These, though full of remarkable felicities of thought and expression, do not show any characteristic marks of emotion, forming in this respect a striking contrast to the next series (Nos. lxii.-lxxvii.), in which the poet, his thoughts full of time and death and human nature, throws into his composition the passionate feeling which he elsewhere expresses through the mouth of dramatic personages. He considers his admiration for his friend as the best antidote against his own self-love (lxii.); he ponders with dread on the thought that his friend may be taken from him by death, and only consoles himself with the assurance that he will still live in his verse (lxiii.-lxv.); compares him, in a vein of tragic bitterness, with the false seeming of the world (lxvi.-lxx.); protests the world's incapacity to estimate his friend's true nature; and dwells with deep melancholy on the unworthiness of his own nature and the transitoriness of all mortal things (lxxi.-lxxvii.). Amid his trouble he is sustained (lxxiv.) by thinking on the excellence of his friend:—

[1] Compare vol. i. p. 175.

> But be contented: when that fell arrest
> Without all bail shall carry me away,
> My life hath in this line some interest,
> Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
> When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
> The very part was consecrate to thee:
> The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
> My spirit is thine, the better part of me.

In Nos. lxxix.-lxxxvi. he pleads for himself in a more conventional vein against the claims of some poet who seeks to rival him in his friend's affections; and then follows a series of Sonnets (lxxxvii.-xcvi.) indicating a certain coolness and estrangement on the part of the friend; while the writer himself in many of the remaining Sonnets up to cxxvi. acknowledges lapses and infidelities of his own, all of which are atoned for by the final reconciliation and the return of a love refined, enlarged, and completed by the experiences of the interval of separation and suffering. Some of the Sonnets in this group (*e.g.* Nos. cxi., cxii., cxxi.) read as if they had been purposely detached from Nos. xxxvi., xxxvii., which, alluding as they do to some blot on the poet's good name, indicate the reason for the enforced separation between the two friends; such Sonnets, however, are perfectly consistent with the general vein of feeling in the conclusion, which proclaims that "next to heaven" (No. cx.) true friendship is the best refuge alike from the allurements of sense and (cxii.) from the slander and injustice of the world.

Nevertheless, if we may trust the history of the Sonnets, there was a period in the poet's life when this external resting-place failed him; when his ideal was shattered; when his friend was removed from him, not only by selfishness and treachery, but even by coldness, ingratitude, alienation. At such a time the "despairing love" spoken of in Sonnet cxliv. must have coloured his whole view of men and things, causing him to feel with peculiar bitterness the slights or misrepresentations of the society about him. When the friends were again reconciled the poet records his experiences during the interval of desertion:

That you were once unkind befriends me now,
And for that sorrow which I then did feel
Needs must I under my transgression bow,
Unless my nerves were brass or hammered steel:
For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
As I by yours, *you've passed a hell of time*,
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken,
To weigh how once I suffered in your crime.[1]

He describes his mode of life in his solitude a
despair :—

Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new;
Most true it is that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worst essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, have what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A god in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving breast.[2]

As to his attitude towards the world of men in his period of abandonment, we may infer what his feelings must have been from his language after the reconciliation :—

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me then, and wish I were renewed.[3]

And :—

Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow?
You are my all the world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none alive,

[1] Sonnet cxx. [2] Sonnet cx. [3] Sonnet cxi.

> That my steeled sense or changes right or wrong.
> In so profound abysm I throw all care
> Of others' voices, that my adder's sense
> To critic and to flatterer stopped are.
> Mark how with my neglect I do dispense:
> You are so strongly in my purpose bred
> That all the world besides methinks are dead.[1]

Passing on to the second division of the Sonnets we find a still more remarkable blending of universal human experience with individual feeling, and with veins of dramatic thought running through Shakespeare's plays.

As to the particular female form which the "woman coloured ill," the Bad Angel of the story, assumes in the Sonnets, many have remarked how closely the description of this mysterious woman corresponds with the person and character of Cleopatra, as imagined by Shakespeare. The woman of the Sonnets is distinguished, not so much for beauty, as for an inexplicable fascination that carries away the poet's judgment and reason in spite of himself. She is of dark hair and complexion, a type then contrary to the received ideal of physical loveliness. Nevertheless:—

> Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
> As those whose beauties proudly make them cruel;
> For well thou know'st to my dear doting heart
> Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.
> Yet, in good faith, some say that thee behold
> Thy face hath not the power to make love groan:
> To say they err I dare not be so bold,
> Although I swear it to myself alone.
> And, to be sure that is not false I swear,
> A thousand groans, but thinking on thy face,
> One on another's neck, do witness bear
> Thy black is fairest in my judgment's place.
> In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds,
> And thence this slander, as I think, proceeds.[2]

So speak Antony's clear-seeing friends of his infatuation for Cleopatra:—

> PHILO. Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,

[1] Sonnet cxii.

[2] Sonnet cxxxi.

The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
Which, in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust. Look, where they come:
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool.[1]

Again, the following sonnet may be compared, both with what Cleopatra, in this play, says of her own attractions, and with Antony's invectives against her in a moment of freedom:—

CXXXVII

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
If *eyes corrupt by over-partial looks*
Be anchored in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood has thou forged hooks,
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
Why should my heart think that a several plot,
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?
Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
  In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,
  And to this false plague are they now transferred.

Cleopatra, triumphing in the thought of her influence over Antony, says:—

Think on me,
That am with Phœbus' amorous pinches black,
And wrinkled deep in time? Broad-fronted Cæsar,
When thou wast here above the ground, I was
A morsel for a monarch: and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;
There would he *anchor his aspect*, and die
With looking on his life.[2]

But Antony speaks of her like the writer of the Sonnet:—

You have been a boggler ever;
But when we in our viciousness grow hard—
O misery on't!—the wise God seel our eyes;

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act i. Sc. 1.

[2] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 5.

In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at's, while we strut
To our confusion.

CLEOPATRA. O, is't come to this?

ANTONY. I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Cæsar's trencher; nay you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's; beside what hotter hours,
Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously picked out; for I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is.[1]

Hence we may conjecture that, while the groundwork of the poetical portrait painted in the last Sonnets may well have been the real "object of sense" spoken of by Dante, this bad angel (as well as Cleopatra in the play) is also intended as an impersonation of "the fleshly lusts which war against the soul"; of "the carnal mind which is enmity against God"; nor is it to be denied that this universal aspect of human nature is constantly being presented to us in Shakespeare's other dramas. Love, as the overwhelming power that prevails over the spirit, the judgment, and the conscience, exhibits itself not only in Antony, false to all considerations of public faith and honour, but in Proteus, a traitor to the most solemn obligations of private friendship:—

To leave my Julia shall I be forsworn,
To love fair Silvia shall I be forsworn,
To wrong my friend I shall be much forsworn,
And even that power which gave me first my oath
Provokes me to this threefold perjury:
Love bids me swear and love bids me forswear[2]

To Claudio in *Much ado about Nothing*, when he supposes that Don Pedro is taking advantage of his position to seduce the affections of Hero from himself, such amorous treachery seems at least natural:—

Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love:
Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues;
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch,
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iii. Sc. 13.
[2] *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act ii. Sc. 6.

> This is an accident of hourly proof
> Which I mistrusted not.[1]

Even the austere Angelo, who

> Scarce confesses
> That his blood flows, or that his appetite
> Is more to bread than stone,[2]

finds that all the barriers of honour, place, and dignity are swept away by the flood of passion :—

> When I would pray and think, I think and pray
> To several subjects. Heaven hath my empty words;
> Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
> *Anchors* on Isabel: Heaven in my mouth,
> As if I only did but chew his name:
> And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
> Of my conception. The state, whereon I studied,
> Is like a good thing being often read,
> Grown feared and tedious; yea, my gravity,
> Wherein—let no man hear me—I take pride,
> Could I with boot change for an idle plume,
> Which the air beats for vain. O place, O form,
> How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
> Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
> To thy false viewing. Blood, thou art blood:
> Let's write good angel on the devil's horn;
> 'Tis not the devil's crest.[3]

The consequences of the submission of man's nature to the control of this Evil Angel are imaged in the most tragic of all the Sonnets, No. cxxix :—

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
> Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
> Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme:
> A bliss in proof, and, proved, a very woe:
> Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.
>   All this the world knows well, yet none knows well
>   To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

[1] *Much ado about Nothing*, Act ii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Measure for Measure*, Act i. Sc. 3. [3] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 4.

With these powerful lines should be compared the almost equally impressive description in *The Rape of Lucrece*:—

> O, deeper sin than bottomless conceit
> Can comprehend in still imagination!
> Drunken Desire must vomit his receipt
> Ere he can see his own abomination.
> While Lust is in his pride, no exclamation
> Can curb his heat or rein his rash desire,
> Till like a jade Self-will himself doth tire.
>
> And then with lank and lean discoloured cheek,
> With heavy eye, knit brow, and strengthless pace,
> Feeble Desire, all recreant, poor, and meek,
> Like to a bankrupt beggar wails his case:
> The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace,
> For there it revels; and when that decays,
> The guilty rebel for remission prays.
>
> So fares it with this faultful lord of Rome,
> Who this accomplishment so hotly chased;
> For now against himself he sounds this doom,
> That through the length of times he stands disgraced;
> Besides, his soul's fair temple is defaced;
> To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,
> To ask the spotted princess how she fares.
>
> She says, her subjects with foul insurrection
> Have battered down her consecrated wall,
> [illegible]
>
> Which in her prescience she controlled still,
> But her foresight could not forestall their will.

The imagery in the last two stanzas has its parallel in Sonnet cxlvi.:—

> Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
> [Spoil of] these *rebel powers* that thee array,
> Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,
> Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?
> Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
> Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?
> Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
> Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?
> Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,
> And let that pine to aggravate thy store;
> Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;
> Within be fed, without be rich no more:

So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,
And Death once dead, there's no more dying then.

This evidence (which might be vastly multiplied) is sufficient to prove the intimate connection of thought between Shakespeare's lyrical and his dramatic or epic compositions. From it we are justly entitled to draw certain conclusions. First we may conclude that, in Shakespeare's general view of life as well as in his ideal creations, we have the conceptions, not merely of a "hack playwright," but of deep personal experience, projected into an imaginative form. Further, these dramatic and epic conceptions must have proceeded from a nature very open, on the one side, to all the attractions of sense,—most sensitive, on the other, to the judgment of conscience, and animated by deep religious feeling; hence it is likely that the mental conflicts in such a man were acute and severe. And lastly, it may be reasonably supposed that a mind of such strong instincts and passions would, in its immaturity, have committed itself to the guidance of a single principle of life and conduct, which may have caused the poet to sympathise for a time with the views of the band of dramatists who were directly influenced by the manners and philosophy of Italy. As his knowledge of life and dramatic art advanced, Shakespeare's mode of conception and his forms of expression, both in tragedy and comedy, attained an admirable balance; but it is undeniable that, in his latest plays, a vein of bitterness, indeed of pessimism, mingles with the most sublime creations of his genius. "There seems," says Hallam with great truth, "to have been a period of Shakespeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience; the memory of hours misspent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature which intercourse with unworthy associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches: these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear or Timon, but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind."[1]

[1] Hallam, *History of European Literature* (edition of 1860), vol. iii. p. 309.

These words are a striking comment on the character of many of the Sonnets—poems which may be regarded as being a kind of confessions. Viewed in this light they excite mixed feelings. So strongly antipathetic to the temper of modern times are many of the topics treated in them, that it is possible Hallam may be giving utterance to a wide-spread sentiment in wishing that they had never been written.[1] Those who express such a desire perhaps hardly realise that, had it been fulfilled, we should not only have lost some of the most exquisite of the world's poetry, but also the clue to the profoundest motives of Shakespeare's dramatic invention. Nevertheless, even such a sacrifice might be preferable to the loss of reverence for the poet which some imagine to be the consequence of accepting the Sonnets as a personal revelation.

> By this key
> Shakespeare unlocked his heart, the critics say:
> Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he—

says Browning, echoing, I presume, Hallam's objection to the "servile" tone of idolatry prevailing in many of the Sonnets. But this is to fall precisely into the error, noticed in an earlier volume, of those who read Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* in a literal and prosaic sense, and without any regard to the artistic form in which the feelings are embodied.[2] Shakespeare in his Sonnets, as Wordsworth and other poets have recognised, does "unlock his heart"; but he allows us to perceive his intimate emotions only through the traditional veil of poetry consecrated to this purpose by the usage of many generations; nor can any reader possibly interpret his language aright without first placing himself morally, intellectually, and socially, in the place of the writer. When we have done this; when we have divested ourselves in imagination of our own surroundings, and have passed into the spiritual atmosphere of the sixteenth century; when we have perceived that the ideal exaltation of masculine friendship had, through the influence of the Renaissance, replaced in

[1] *History of European Literature*, vol. iii. p. 264.
[2] See vol. ii. pp. 226-232.

many minds the chivalrous woman worship of the Middle Ages; when we recognise that the style of "servility" adopted towards the poet's friend is merely a development of the poetical language, consecrated, in earlier times, to the worship of Beatrice and Laura,—then it will be allowed that there is nothing in the Sonnets which need lessen our reverence for the great name of Shakespeare. On the other hand, we shall then be able to pass behind the mask of the tragic and comic poet, and, mingling more intimately with the great array of ideal characters which surround him, the Macbeths and the Hamlets, the Malvolios and the Falstaffs, we shall enter into the heart of the man who conceived them. That heart was not like those of which the poet says, that "they rightly do inherit Heaven's graces":

> Who moving others, are themselves as stone,
> Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow.[1]

In the largeness of its own frail nature it was in all directions touched by the feeling of human infirmities; but the Sonnets reveal in it nothing mean, base, or ignoble. Rather, we perceive from these poems the truth of what Shelley says of poets, that "they learn in suffering what they teach in song." For who can read the Sonnets without perceiving from their lyrical intensity what a depth of personal feeling is thrown into dramatic touches in plays instinct with an otherwise inexplicable life and character? How vividly, for instance, does the craving for the good opinion of the world, embodied in the Sonnet beginning, "'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed," express itself in Macbeth's restraining reflection that he has lately

> won
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people!

How does the tone of inward suffering, caused to the writer of the Sonnets by the impression "which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow," thrill through Hamlet's words to Ophelia: "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny!"[2] Such a

[1] Sonnet xciv.

[2] *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

Sonnet as cxlvi., already cited, gives a peculiar significance to what Don Pedro in *Much Ado About Nothing* says of Benedick: "The man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make."[1]

When, however, we have once ascertained, through the Sonnets, the strong lyrical note that runs through Shakespeare's plays, we have pushed analysis far enough. The poet himself, while alive, asked with just indignation:—

> For why should others' false adulterate eyes
> Give salutation to my sportive blood?
> Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
> Which in their wills think bad what I think good?
> No, I am what I am, and they that level
> At my abuses reckon up their own:
> I may be straight though they themselves be bevel:
> By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown.[2]

Even more justly we may apply these words to those who, nearly three hundred years after the poet's death, pry into his affairs with rash curiosity, and attach a literal meaning to thoughts and words which he himself left intentionally obscure. No positive inference can be drawn from his Sonnets as to the persons and incidents alluded to in them. If any one should be inclined to form an unfavourable estimate of his character from the apparent vein of over-emotional weakness which they exhibit, this idea is to be corrected by reference to the masculine strength of his work as a whole, by such conceptions of genuine manliness as are embodied in the persons of Henry V., Horatio, Antonio, Benedick, or Biron. For any conclusions as to the poet's morals, we have no right to travel beyond the facts which are recorded about him by documentary or personal evidence; and these exhibit him to us only as the prudent man of business, the courteous manager, the amiable and delightful companion. In the Sonnets we *feel* the man himself; the insight we gain from them we are entitled to use for the interpretation, not of his personality, but of his art.

[1] *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act ii. Sc. 3.

[2] Sonnet cxxi.

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S EARLY TRAGEDIES: INFLUENCE OF MARLOWE

THE earliest mention of Shakespeare's acknowledged pre-eminence as a dramatist is by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, 1598, in which the writer says:—

> As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for comedy witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour's Lost*, his *Love's Labour's Won*, his *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy his *Richard II.*, *Richard III.*, *Henry IV.*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet.*

We have no evidence prior to 1597—the year in which the quarto editions of *Richard II.*, *Richard III.* and *Romeo and Juliet*, apparently, first were published—to show that any of the plays mentioned by Meres originally appeared substantially in their existing form, which is that of the folio edition of 1623. Nor does Meres' list appear to aim at being exhaustive. At any rate it makes no mention of the three parts of *King Henry VI.*, nor of *The Taming of the Shrew*; while, on the other hand, there is no surviving trace of any play with the title of *Love's Labour's Won.* Nevertheless we have excellent grounds for believing that, in some form or another, *Titus Andronicus* was produced before 1590. We also know that the two plays now known as *King John* and *The Taming of THE Shrew* were based on

older plays entitled respectively, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* and *The Taming of A Shrew;* and also that the second and third parts of *Henry VI.* were reproductions with very slight alterations of two plays, one called *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, first published in quarto in 1594, and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Death of Good King Henry the Sixt*, first published in quarto in 1595.

A long controversy has raged round the question of the authorship of these various early plays. By the older Germans, and some of the earlier English commentators, they were assigned, without much investigation, to Shakespeare; by almost all the English and American critics since Malone (whose opinions have been adopted by many of the modern Germans) Shakespeare has been regarded either as a partner in the plays with other dramatists, or as the unblushing plagiarist of other men's work. In the Appendix to this volume I have examined the various theories that have been advanced on the subject and have stated my own opinion; I need only here therefore repeat my conviction that the elder German critics are right, and the later English wrong, and that Shakespeare alone was the author not only of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, but of *Titus Andronicus*, *The Taming of A Shrew*, and *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*. In this chapter I shall start with this assumption, and shall endeavour to set before the reader the characterof the poet's earliest work, and the influences to which it owed its form.

When Shakespeare began his career as a dramatist the character of theatrical taste had been decisively formed by the practice of Marlowe. *Tamburlaine* had sufficiently manifested to the general imagination the value of Machiavelli's doctrines as the groundwork of dramatic action. Followed as this play had been by *Faustus* and the *Jew of Malta*, the English theatre was now familiar with the representation of resolute villainy, and other playwrights had learned from the example set them by Marlowe to exhibit glaring actions of Lust, Pride Avarice, and, above all, of Revenge.

It was quite natural therefore for a young dramatist like Shakespeare to accommodate himself to the prevailing taste, and in *Titus Andronicus* he showed that he could furnish the public with the entertainment it desired. This play is coupled by Ben Jonson in the Dedication to *Bartholomew Fair* with the *Spanish Tragedy* as an example of the tragic melodrama in vogue about the time of the Spanish Armada; it may therefore be fairly regarded as Shakespeare's maiden play. He has evidently modelled it on *The Spanish Tragedy*, but intends to out-do his original. Like Kyd's play, the story on which it is founded, while professing to be historical, is entirely fictitious, and sets forth, on the one hand, the revenge of Tamora, Queen of the Goths, on Titus Andronicus, general of the Romans, who had sacrificed her children, and, on the other, the retaliation of Andronicus. Horrors abound in every act. Titus and his daughter are shockingly mutilated by the device of Tamora; and the Roman, in return, having killed the Queen's two sons, bakes their heads and serves them up to their mother in a Thyestean banquet. Out of over twenty *dramatis personæ* only ten are left alive at the end of the play. The characters are imitated from models in Kyd and Marlowe. Titus Andronicus, in the feigned madness which conceals his plan of revenge, is closely studied after Jeronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*; while Aaron, the villainous Moor, is a repetition of Barabas in the *Jew of Malta*, whose boasts he reproduces in almost identical words:—

> Even now I curse the day—and yet I think
> Few come within the compass of my curse—
> Wherein I did not some notorious ill,
> As kill a man, or else devise his death,
> Ravish a maid, or plan the way to do it,
> Accuse some innocent, and forswear myself,
> Set deadly enmity between two friends,
> Make poor men's cattle break their necks,
> Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night.
> Etc. Etc.[1]

[1] *Titus Andronicus*, Act v. Sc. 1. Compare *Jew of Malta*, Act ii. (Dyce's edition of Marlowe's *Works*, p. 157).

Like Barabas too, Aaron dies resolute:—

> I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
> I should repent the evils I have done:
> Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
> Would I perform, if I might have my will:
> If one good deed in all my life I did
> I do repent it from my very soul.[1]

The style, like all the work of Marlowe's school, is tumid and extravagant, decorated with scraps of Latin, and abounding in classical allusion, as in the following rant of Aaron when he saves his and Tamora's child from the swords of the Queen's sons:—

> Now, by the burning tapers of the sky,
> That shone so brightly when this boy was got,
> He dies upon my scimitar's sharp point
> That touches this my first-born son and heir!
> I tell you, younglings, not Enceladus,
> With all his threatening band of Typhon's brood,
> Nor great Alcides, nor the god of war,
> Shall seize this prey out of his father's hands.[2]

Nevertheless in many respects *Titus Andronicus* marked the advent of a dramatist of high genius. Improbable as is the action of the play, it is much better constructed than any of Marlowe's dramas, and it is free from the absurdities of mechanism—such as the introduction of persons like Andrea's Ghost and Revenge—which appear in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Moreover the new writer showed that he possessed what Kyd and Marlowe utterly lacked, the power of pathos; and the following passage, marred though it is by grave faults of taste, reads like an anticipation of the finished style of emotional imagery prevailing in the latter part of *Richard II.* Marcus and Titus Andronicus are discoursing about the dumb and mutilated Lavinia:—

> MARC. O, thus I found her, straying in the park,
> Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer
> TIT. It was my deer; and he that wounded her
> Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead:

[1] *Titus Andronicus*, Act v. Sc. 3. Compare speech of Barabas, cited in vol. ii. p. 415.

[2] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 2.

For now I stand as one upon a rock
Environed with a wilderness of sea,
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
Expecting ever when some envious surge
Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.
This way to death my wretched sons are gone;
Here stands my other son, a banished man,
And here my brother, weeping at my woes:
But that which gives my soul the greatest spurn,
Is dear Lavinia, dearer than my soul.
Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,
It would have madded me: what shall I do
Now I behold thy lively body so?
Thou hast no hands, to wipe away thy tears;
Nor tongue, to tell me who hath martyred thee:
Thy husband he is dead; and for his death
Thy brothers are condemned, and dead by this.
Look, Marcus! ah, son Lucius, look on her!
When I did name her brothers, then fresh tears
Stood on her cheeks, as doth the honey-dew
Upon a gathered lily almost withered.

MARC. Perchance she weeps because they killed her husband;
Perchance because she knows them innocent.

TIT. If they did kill thy husband, then be joyful,
Because the law hath ta'en revenge on them.
No, no, they would not do so foul a deed;
Witness the sorrow that their sister makes.
Gentle Lavinia, let me kiss thy lips;
Or make some sign how I may do thee ease:
Shall thy good uncle, and thy brother Lucius,
And thou, and I, sit round about some fountain,
Looking all downwards, to behold our cheeks
How they are stained, as meadows, yet not dry,
With miry slimes left on them by a flood?
And in the fountain shall we gaze so long
Till the fresh taste be taken from that clearness,
And made a brine-pit with our bitter tears?
Or shall we cut away our hands, like thine?
Or shall we bite our tongue, and in dumb show
Pass the remainder of our hateful days?
What shall we do? let us, that have our tongues,
Plot some device of further misery,
To make us wondered at in time to come.

If these lines were really written in 1589, it must be admitted that they are superior to anything in *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, which was probably Shakespeare's next dramatic work, since it is stated in the

quarto edition of the play, published in 1591, that it had then been "sundry times publikely acted by the Queene's Majesties Players, in the honourable Citie of London." The author in his Prologue, addressed "To the Gentlemen Readers," sets forth the intention of his play:—

> You that, with friendly grace of smoothed brow,
> Have entertained the Scythian Tamburlaine,
> And given applause unto an infidel,
> Vouchsafe to welcome (with like curtesie)
> A warlike Christian and your countryman.
> For Christ's true faith endured he many a storm,
> And set himself against the Man of Rome;
> Until base treason by a damned wight
> Did all his former triumphs put to flight.
> Accept of it (sweet gentles) in good sort,
> And think it was prepared for your disport.

Read in connection with the changes afterwards made in the form of the play, this Prologue throws a strong light on the development of Shakespeare's dramatic motives. For it is plain that the author of *The Troublesome Raigne* was of the school of Marlowe, and composed his play on the Machiavellian principles favoured by that great poet; a fact that stands out in prominent relief when the original sketch of the Bastard Falconbridge is contrasted with the finished character as it appears in *King John*. In the later play the Bastard is represented as a humourist, who sees through the show of things, like Jaques, and who conceals strong, and sometimes noble, feelings under blunt and cynical forms of speech. But in *The Troublesome Raigne* Falconbridge is utterly devoid of humour. It may be observed that the entire episode of Falconbridge is brought into connection with the History of King John quite arbitrarily, and yet so strongly was the imagination of the poet possessed with the idea of *virtù*, of which the Bastard is the embodiment, that this personage is made to play a leading part among the historical actors. When he first comes into the presence of the King he is represented as being in a reverie, divided between ambition and prudence:

> Fond man, ah, whither art thou carried?
> How are thy thoughts ywrapt in Honour's heaven
> Forgetful what thou art, and whence thou comest?
> Thy father's land cannot maintain these thoughts;
> These thoughts are far unfitting Fauconbridge:
> And well they may; for why this mounting mind
> Doth soar too high to stoop to Fauconbridge.
> Why how now? knowest thou where thou art?
> And knowest thou who expects thine answer here?
> Wilt thou upon a frantic madding vein
> Go lose thy land, and say thyself base-born?
> No, keep thy land, though Richard were thy sire:
> Whate'er thou think'st say thou art Fauconbridge.
>
> JOHN. Speak man, be sudden, who thy father was
>
> PHILIP. Please it your worship, Sir Robert——
> Philip, that Fauconbridge cleaves to thy jaws;
> It will not out, I cannot, for my life,
> Say I am son unto a Fauconbridge.

The resolution itself is one that would have been approved by the Guise and Mortimer of Marlowe; but the process by which it is arrived at is characteristic of the younger poet, who is capable of seeing things on both sides. Marlowe would not have conceived the conflict in the Bastard's mind: he would have brought him into the royal presence with his mind resolved.

Again the Prologue to *The Troublesome Raigne* shows that, apart from this general view of *virtù*, the poet intended to make the play an historical illustration of the Machiavellian doctrine. John, usurper though he was, was to be treated as a Protestant hero, according to the precedent set in Bale's *King Johan*, and with the hope of securing the sympathies of an audience still heated with the recent experience of the Spanish Armada. To a certain extent the poet carried out his intention, as may be seen from the following soliloquy of John, when he has been deserted by the Barons after the murder of Arthur:—

> Then, John, there is no way to keep thy crown,
> But firmly to dissemble with the Pope:
> That hand that gave the wound must give the salve
> To cure the hurt else quite incurable.
> Thy sins are far too great to be the man
> T' abolish Pope and Popery from the realm:

> But in thy seat, if I may guess at all,
> A king shall reign that shall suppress them all.
> Peace, John, here comes the Legate of the Pope;
> Dissemble thou, and whatsoe'er thou sayst,
> Yet with thy heart wish their confusion.

Practically this speech amounts to a confession of failure on the part of the dramatist. He was trying to combine two incompatible things, Machiavellism and Protestantism. He had announced that John was to be the hero of the play, but when working out his idea he found it equally impossible to represent Lackland as a man of real *virtù*, or the murderer of Arthur as a good Protestant. Popular as the play was, the poet was dissatisfied with it, and when he recast it—obviously in the full maturity of his genius—while he retained the entire historical framework, even to the succession of the original scenes,[1] and all the *dramatis personæ*, he completely altered the philosophical aspect of the drama. The process by which he effected this transformation was a miracle of art and judgment. All trace of an intention to illustrate the doctrine of individual *virtù* was removed; all references to John's anticipation of Protestantism disappeared; the centre of interest was shifted from the King to the person and fortunes of Arthur. By these means the character of John was exhibited in its true light, and the human interest of the action was vastly increased; Constance, who, in *The Troublesome Raigne*, had appeared merely as a scolding woman, like the rival Queens in *Richard III.*, now appealed with immortal eloquence to the hearts of the audience as a bereaved mother; the comparatively cold and Seneca-like dialogue between Arthur and Hubert was replaced by scenes of infinite pathos; the offensive buffoonery in the scene of the Bastard's visit to the Monastery—inserted to gratify the anti-Papal taste of the audience—was omitted; the self-seeking *virtù* of the Bastard himself was expanded into the energy of resolute and resourceful patriotism. Though *King John*, even in its present form, cannot be reckoned a

[1] See Appendix, p. 463.

good acting play, there is no play of Shakespeare which presents a more vivid and stirring reflection of the drama of English history.

It is likely that the success of *The Troublesome Raigne*, and the pleasure which the audience felt in witnessing scenes from the history of their country vividly presented to them on the stage, induced Shakespeare to make further experiments in the same direction. Henslowe, in his *Diary*, mentions a play called "*Henry the VJ.*" as being first acted on March the 2nd 1591-92, and frequently reproduced; this we may fairly suppose to have been the one afterwards called *First Part of King Henry the Sixth*; and that it excited as much interest as *The Troublesome Raigne* is also probable, for Nash, in one of his pamphlets, says: "How would it have joyed brave Talbot (the terror of the French) to think that after he had lived two hundred years in his tomb he should triumph again on the stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who in the tragedian that represents his person imagine they behold him fresh bleeding."[1] The note of patriotism is, indeed, the dominant characteristic in an otherwise not very interesting play; and the profound emotions it seems to have awakened furnish an apt illustration of Aristotle's remark that the best tragic poets find the subject of their dramas in events which the audience know or believe to have really happened.[2]

In 1592 we have evidence to show that Shakespeare was already regarded as the rising star in the theatrical world. Robert Greene, at the conclusion of his pamphlet called *A Groat's Worth of Wit bought with a Million of Repentance*, published in that year, thus addresses Marlowe, Peele, and a writer whom he terms "Young Juvenal":—

> Base-minded men all three of you, if by misery ye be not warned: for unto none of you (like me) sought those burs to cleave; those puppets I mean that speak from our mouths, those anticks garnished in our colours. Is it not strange that I to

[1] Nash, *Pierce Penilesse*.

[2] Aristotle, *Poetics*, ix. 6.

whom they have all been beholding, is it not like that you to whom they have all been beholding, shall, were ye in that case that I am now, be both of them at once forsaken? Yet, trust them not: for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers, that, with his *tiger's heart wrapt in a player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute *Johannes Fac-totum*, is, in his own conceit, the only Shake-scene in a country.

These words have (since they were cited by Malone) been supposed to contain a charge of plagiarism against Shakespeare, with special reference to the second and third parts of *King Henry the Sixth*, in the latter of which occurs the line which Greene parodies Greene, Marlowe, and Peele are conjectured (merely on the evidence of Greene's expressions) to have co-operated in the production of the plays called respectively the *First Part of the Contention between the Two famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, which plays Shakespeare is supposed in 1592 to have appropriated for his *Henry the Sixth*. As I have elsewhere analysed the grounds of this hypothesis,[1] I will only say here that it is in my opinion incredible that, if Shakespeare had really done what is imputed to him, Greene would have used such mild language about so astounding a theft. His words really prove no more than the jealousy with which Shakespeare was regarded by the school of Marlowe. In the eyes of these dramatists the former would naturally have appeared an "upstart crow." It was they (and particularly Marlowe) who had set the new dramatic fashion; who had first satisfied the public craving for stirring incidents and strong emotions on the stage; who had taught the players to "bombast out a blank verse." Now they saw themselves surpassed in public favour by a man who had learned from them the first elements of their art, and who had shown his appreciation of their genius by a close imitation of their dramatic style, or, as Greene puts it, by beautifying himself with their feathers. At the same time they could not but perceive that their rival had, in his

[1] See Appendix, pp. 460-463.

historic dramas, struck out a path for himself in which their genius did not qualify them to follow him: hence the bitter and contemptuous tone in which Greene speaks both of Shakespeare's self-confidence, and of the fickleness of the actors who had transferred their admiration to the popular idol.

As to Shakespeare himself, popularity exercised both on his invention and judgment an influence not seen in the art of his predecessors. Marlowe was eminently a creator: he had founded a taste, not followed one. By his impassioned rendering of the doctrines of Machiavelli on the stage he had raised the imagination of his audience, as much as he had delighted their ears with the harmony of his "mighty line." But having achieved this success, he constantly repeated his leading motive, and, had he lived, he would probably have continued to produce types of Resolution from the same mould that had already created Tamburlaine, Faustus, Barabas, and Guise. There is no sign in his plays that he had any sympathy with the patriotic feelings which prevailed among his hearers, and which Peele at any rate, among his followers, partially shared, as he shows in his *Edward I.* and *Battle of Alcazar.* Peele, however, wanted the genius to develop his sentiments in a dramatic form, and it may be doubted whether Shakespeare himself, who had begun his career as a humble imitator, anticipated the effect produced by *The Troublesome Raigne.* But when he perceived that he had struck upon a vein of feeling which brought him into sympathy with his audience, the character of his dramatic art began at once to transform itself. *The First Part of King Henry VI.* is not inspired, like *The Troublesome Raigne*, by an abstract idea: the dramatist's leading motive is evidently to exhibit on the stage a number of life-like scenes from English history; to do, in fact, in a dramatic form what the authors of the *Mirror for Magistrates* had rudely done a generation before in an epic form. Encouraged by the applause with which the spectators welcomed the representation of the death of Talbot, Shakespeare's imagination now conceived the vast idea of dramatising the Wars of the Roses.

The whole tetralogy closing with *King Richard III.* forms a study of Machiavellism on a large scale, a dramatic comment on the theory "Might is Right." Hardly is the breath out of the body of the valiant Henry V. when the tragedy of fortune begins. An infant succeeds to the English throne: selfish factions at once contend for the government of the kingdom, and at the same time the imperial power of England begins to wane: it is in vain that the forces of patriotism, represented by Talbot, fight to maintain the conquests that have been won; the power of selfish craft and intrigue, masked under the guise of patriotism, emerges in the person of York to lay claim to the throne; on the other hand, the egotistic ambition of Suffolk precipitates the fall of the House of Lancaster by a treaty of marriage degrading to the nation. In the Second Part the interest of the action is centred with rare skill in the fortunes of Humphrey, called the good Duke of Gloucester, ruined partly by the ambition of his wife, partly by the associated craft of Beaufort, Suffolk, and the Queen. In his murder the triumph of the powers of Evil seems to culminate; and thus far it may be said that the doctrines of the *Principe* of Machiavelli have been fully vindicated.

But at this point the moral character of Shakespeare's idea of life makes its appearance. Not one of the parties to the crime escapes from the hand of justice. The Cardinal dies in torment and despair; Suffolk is murdered by pirates; the Queen, distracted by the loss of her lover, is forced to experience further suffering in the overthrow of her husband, and to feel a mother's pangs when her son is stabbed before her eyes on the field of battle. York again—who has climbed to supreme power by his crafty encouragement, on the one hand, of Suffolk's intrigue against Gloucester, and, on the other, of Cade's insurrection, as well as by his persuasive influence over the more patriotic elements in the English nobility represented by Warwick—is deserted by Fortune at the height of his triumph, and, after all his scheming, perishes miserably at Wakefield. Edward, his son, raised by the aid of War

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wick to the throne, is unable to resist his own sensual nature, so that the possibility of reigning discovers itself, though through many obstacles, to Gloucester, his brother.

King Richard III. is a continued illustration of the results of Machiavellian philosophy. After the death of Edward, Gloucester by secret craft removes out of his road first his brother and then his nephews; he destroys by force Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, and Buckingham; he prevails by subtle flattery and persuasions over the weak wills of women like the Lady Anne and Elizabeth the Queen, whose compliance is necessary to promote his ends. Yet his wickedness is in vain. His tyranny overreaches itself; when Richmond invades the country all hearts are against Richard; and on the eve of battle Conscience—the protagonist of the old Moralities—discloses to him the realities of things. Waking from his dream he cries:—

> Give me another horse: bind up my wounds.
> Have mercy, Jesu!—Soft! I did but dream.
> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
> The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
> Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
> What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why:
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
> Alack! I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
> That I myself have done unto myself?
> O, no! alas! I rather hate myself
> For hateful deeds committed by myself!
> I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not.
> Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter.
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.
> Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree;
> Murder, stern murder, in the dir'st degree;
> All several sins, all used in each degree,
> Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! guilty!
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
> And if I die, no soul shall pity me:
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity to myself?

some Raigne of King John. In the latter play the poet is first seen to be abandoning the abstract ways of thinking which he had followed in *Titus Andronicus.* Though traces of the old influence of the "Scythian Tamburlaine" may be observed in the character of the king, and though the principle of *virtù* is still exalted in the person of the Bastard, there is no attempt to introduce into the play any equivalent to Aaron, the villainous Moor, who rejoices in the perpetration of evil for its own sake. The poet is on English ground, limited by the definite facts of English history, inspired by the interest and sympathy of an English audience. Finding, perhaps almost by chance, in *The Troublesome Raigne*, that he possessed the key to this sympathy and interest, he seems to have prepared his imagination for a higher flight, and, as he dwelt in thought upon the ancient life of his country, something of the solemn spirit that had moved the rude old epic poets of *The Mirror of Magistrates* descended upon the greatest of dramatists. In the naïve and simple narratives of Fabian, Hall, and Holinshed, a hundred dramatic scenes and situations suggested themselves to his mind, and his study of the chronicles may have revealed to him the profounder sense animating the arid personifications of Conscience and Justice in the old Moralities. Certain it is that the idea of the drama of life presented in *King Henry VI.* and *King Richard III.* is far more varied, more emotional, more religious, more philosophical, than in *Titus Andronicus*, or even *The Troublesome Raigne of King John.* Marlowe's favourite type of character is still prominent, but York, Suffolk, and Richard are not, like Guise and Mortimer, mere selfish resolute villains, who have mounted the wheel of fortune only to be precipitated from a greater height: they are moral agents who, like Gloucester in *King Lear*, suffer the consequences of their own actions :—

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Do make us plagues to scourge us.

In the scene of Cardinal Beaufort's deathbed, in Clarence's

dream, and in the last dream of Richard III., the poet first showed (in a somewhat melodramatic form) how deeply he shared the sentiment he afterwards put into the mouth of Hamlet, that "Conscience doth make cowards of us all."

Germs of other dramatic contrasts, developed in later dramas, also discover themselves in *King Henry VI.*, particularly the influence of resolute women on weak or hesitating men. The aspiring and relentless Margaret is the natural antithesis to her poor-spirited husband: in the first scene between the ambitious Duchess of Gloucester and her husband we have a faint forecast of the relations between Macbeth and his wife. Indicative above all of Shakespeare's wonderful growth in imaginative power are the admirable scenes representing Cade's insurrection. Here, for the first time, the dramatist manifests his unequalled insight into the character of the crowd. With something of the resolute force of Tamburlaine, Cade combines the absurd self-sufficiency and ignorance of Dogberry and Bottom, and, like those masterful personages, he is able to impose his will on his still more ignorant followers, some of whom are quite capable of measuring his pretensions. Nowhere perhaps has the mixture of comic and tragic elements in the crowd—its blind ferocity, its rude humour, its hopeless incapacity of reasoning, its rooted prejudice—been so vividly displayed as in the scene representing the murder of Lord Say. Scarcely less admirable, as a rendering of the fickleness of the crowd, is the episode in which the ready and resolute Clifford persuades the rioters to desert their leader in the very height of his success: the brief and trenchant argument between him and Cade is no unworthy anticipation of the elaborate debates between Menenius and the tribunes in *Coriolanus*, or even of the rival speeches of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Cæsar.*

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S EARLIER COMEDIES: INFLUENCE OF LYLY

NOTHING is more remarkable in the comedies of Shakespeare than their variety of type. Between the first draft of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* there is as wide an interval, both intellectually and artistically, as between *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*. This interval is filled with various groups of plays, bound to each other by a common vein of thought and sentiment, yet separated by marked differences of comic motive; and in these groups themselves each particular play is so highly individualised that no two resemble one another as do the comedies of Plautus and Terence. Thus while *The Taming of A Shrew* and *The Comedy of Errors* may be classed together, each, as compared with *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, has a very specific character of its own; and the same is true of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *The Tempest.* Equal versatility is shown by the poet in blending comedy with tragedy: the character of the grave-digger's discourse in *Hamlet* differs from the wit of the fool in *Lear*, and both kinds are as distinct from the raillery of Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* as the style of the latter is from the gossiping chatter of Juliet's nurse. The reason is that the comedies and comic scenes in Shakespeare are the product of a great and philosophic mind, always learning new lessons from experience and observation, not seeking to express its own conceptions in a mere abstract form, but patiently striving

to adapt its ideas of life and nature to the actual requirements of the stage. Every student of Shakespeare should be interested in discovering the gradual process by which he attained to that perfect balance of art which delights us in plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Much Ado about Nothing*.

When Shakespeare began to write for the stage he found in existence three types of comedy. One of these was derived from the Morality. The Morality indeed was, in intention, not comic but didactic; but it was a decaying form of entertainment, and the only part of it suited to the changing taste of the age was the character of the Vice. In the hands of actors like Tarlton and Wilson, this part lent itself to exhibitions of broad extempore buffoonery, and the fool's dress, always worn by the Vice, appealed to that elementary sense of the ludicrous which is satisfied with ideas of incongruity. In a word, the conception of comedy, bequeathed to the stage by the Morality, was much the same in quality as the performances of the clown in the modern pantomime. Specimens of the wit which approved itself to theatrical audiences before the rise of Shakespeare may be seen in Marlowe's *Faustus* and Greene's *Looking Glass for London*.

On a higher level stood the type of the New Comedy. The leading idea of the New Comedy is, up to a certain point, identical with that of tragedy, being the representation of Misfortune—misfortune, however, of a kind which arouses the passion, not of pity and terror, but of laughter, because we perceive that the situation is not serious or irremediable, and are in the meantime pleased both with the sense of our own impunity, as well as with the confusions, mistakes, and intrigues in which other persons are involved. Rude imitations of the New Comedy, retaining some characteristics of the Morality, had been introduced upon the stage in *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. George Gascoigne had further refined the idea of comic action by his translation of Ariosto's *Suppositi;* and a poor but original attempt to naturalise the Italian variety of the New Comedy had been made in

Lyly's *Mother Bombie.* From Italy, in fact, English dramatists and audiences had acquired a knowledge of what was required for comedy in the way of plot and situation.

There was, however, in the New Comedy a certain element alien to the spirit of the Middle Ages, at least as far as that manifested itself in the northern nations of Europe. Its genius was essentially prosaic. As conceived by the Greeks, its merit lay in the close imitation of real life both in action and language; all the intricacies of plot in the plays of the Latin imitators of the Greeks, Plautus and Terence, arise out of incidents which might actually have happened, such as the carrying off of children by pirates; questions about the rights of citizenship; marriages between native citizens and slaves or foreigners. Something resembling this imitation of action on the stage was possible in the restricted life of the self-governing cities of Italy. But nothing like it was as yet conceivable in the still feudal society of England: hence the slowness with which the tradition of the Moralities was displaced by the action of the New Comedy; and hence too the favour at first shown to the "witty" comedies of Lyly, who may be said to have originated the movement which resulted in the Romantic Comedy of Shakespeare. Lyly's first object was to make the action of his dramas unreal.[1] He chose his subjects almost invariably from classical mythology. His heroes and heroines, Midas, Cynthia, Gallathea, and others, were removed from all touch with ordinary humanity. His plots were of the most improbable structure. He invested his actions with a kind of fairy atmosphere, and worked out his *dénouements* (if indeed his plays can be said to have any *dénouement*) by means of divine

[1] In the prologue to *Endimion* he says: "We present neither comedy, nor tragedy, nor story, nor anything, but whosoever heareth may say this, Why, here is a tale of the Man in the Moon"; in the prologue to *Sapho and Phao:* "In all humbleness we all, and I on knee for all entreat, that your Highness imagine yourself to be in a deep dream, that staying the conclusion in your rising your Majesty vouchsafe but to say, *and so you awaked*"; in the prologue to *The Woman in the Moon:*—

"If many faults escape in her discourse
Remember all is but a poet's dream."

agencies. And while he thus studied unreality in his situations, he threw all the strength of his invention into his dialogue, which he endeavoured to enliven by a constant display of the peculiar form of "wit" that he had brought into fashion at Court. I have already described the general characteristics of Lyly's euphuistic dialogue;[1] the following specimen, taken from his *Mydas*, will at once sufficiently illustrate that description, and what will be said hereafter of the influence of this style on the early comedies of Shakespeare:—

LICIO. But, soft! here comes Pipenetta, what news?

PIPENETTA. I would not be in your coats for anything.

LICIO Indeed if thou shouldest rig up and down in our jackets, thou wouldest be thought a very tom-boy.

PIP. I mean I would not be in your cases

PETULUS. Neither shalt thou, Pipenetta, for first they are too little for thy body, and then too fair to pull over so foul a skin.

PIP. These boys be drunk, I would not be in your takings.

LICIO. I think so, for we take nothing in our hands but weapons; it is for thee to use needles and pins, a sampler not a buckler

PIP. Nay, then, we shall never have done! I mean I would not be so curst[2] as you shall be.

PET. Worse and worse! We are no chase (pretty mops);[3] for deer we are not, neither red nor fallow, because we are bachelors, and have not *cornucopia*, we want heads, hares we cannot be, because they are male one year, and the next female, we change not our sex; badgers we are not for our legs are one as long as another; and who will take us to be foxes that stand as near a goose and bite not.

PIP. Fools you are, and therefore good game for wise men to hunt; but knaves I leave you for honest wenches to talk of.

LICIO. Nay, stay, sweet Pipenetta, we are but disposed to be merry.

PIP. I marvel how old you will be before you will be disposed to be honest. But this is the matter, my master has gone abroad, and wants his page to wait on him; my mistress would rise, and lacks your worship to fetch her hair.

PET. Why is it not on her head?

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[1] See vol. ii. p. 362.

[2] It would appear from the following speech of Petulus that he supposed Pipenetta to say "coursed."

[3] This must necessarily, both for the sense and rhythm of the sentence, be the true punctuation. Fairholt (Lyly's editor) reads: "We are no chase (pretty mops) for deer: we are not, etc."—which is nonsense, besides destroying the antithesis.

PIP. Methinks it should be, but I mean the hair that she must wear to-day.

LICIO. Why doth she wear any hair but her own?

PIP. In faith, sir, no, I am sure it's her own when she pays for it. But do you hear the strange news at the Court?

PET. No, except this be it to have one's hair lie all night out of the house from one's head.

PIP. Tush! everything that Mydas toucheth is gold.

PET. The devil it is.

PIP. Indeed, gold is the devil.

LICIO. Thou art deceived, wench, angels are gold. But is it true?

PIP. True? Why, the meat that he toucheth turneth to gold, so doth the drink, so doth his raiment.

PET. I would he would give me a good box on the ear that I might have a golden cheek.

LICIO. How happy shall we be if he would but stroke our heads that we might have golden hairs. But let us all in lest we lose the virtue of the gift before we have the benefit.

PIP. If he take a cudgel, and that turn to gold, yet beating you with it, you shall only feel the weight of gold.

PET. What difference to be beaten with gold and to be beaten gold?

PIP. As much as to say, drink before you go, and go before you drink.

LICIO. Come let us go lest we drink of a dry cup for our long tarrying.[1]

Another feature in Lyly's comedies, afterwards most artistically developed by Shakespeare, was the underplot. In the New Comedy this portion of the dramatic structure was not of great importance, because the principle of the play consisted in the regular evolution of the main plot by means of δέσις (complication) and λύσις (*dénouement*). But the action in Lyly's plays being completely subordinated to the wit of the dialogue, it was the more necessary for him to keep alive the interest of the audience by contrasts of character. Accordingly the speeches of the personages who conduct the thread of the principal action are, in the majority of his court comedies, followed by conversational scenes, in which the combats of wit are maintained with peculiar smartness between speakers whose presence is not needed to advance the movement of the play. In *Endimion*, for example, there is an underplot exhibiting the ridiculous character of Sir Tophas, a braggart knight, who is mocked by his pages; in *Mydas*

[1] Lilly's *Dramatic Works* (Fairholt), vol. ii. pp. 13-15.

(as is seen from the extract just given) the smart pages chop comic logic with waiting-women and huntsmen; in *Gallathea* the action is relieved by interludes, representing the adventures of a cheating alchemist and his apprentices; in *Campaspe* the loves of the heroine and Apelles are diversified by the invectives of the railing philosopher, Diogenes.

The first experiment of Shakespeare in comedy was called *The Taming of A Shrew.* This play was published in quarto in 1594, and had at that date been probably several times witnessed in the theatre. Written while the poet was still under the influence of Marlowe, it cannot compare as a work of art with the revised version, as it stands under the title of *The Taming of* THE *Shrew.* But considered historically, it is a monument of very great interest, because we see in it the first rude sketch of the philosophical idea of life which characterises all Shakespeare's mature creations, and also the earliest tentative efforts of an art unequalled in its power, both of vitalising the crude subject-matter with which it deals, and of fusing conflicting principles of thought in a single organic structure.

The main action, the taming of the wilful heroine, seems to have been borrowed from some Italian story now lost, though the floating *Fabliau,* of which it is a variation, survives in the metrical tale of "The Wife Lapped in Morel's Skin."[1] For the idea of the disguises in the play Shakespeare was indebted to Gascoigne's translation of the *Supposits* of Ariosto. In that comedy (the scene of which is laid in Ferrara) the hero Erostrato has, before the play begins, changed clothes with his servant Dulipo, in order to be in the same house with Polynesta, with whom he is in love. Philogano, his father, is about to arrive from Milan, and the servant, who is transformed into Erostrato, persuades a Siennese gentleman, by a cunning device, to personate Philogano. The appearance of the real Philogano brings on the *dénouement.* In imitation of this plot, Aurelio, the principal lover in *The Taming of A Shrew,* changes characters

[1] C. Hazlitt, *Shakespeare's Library,* Part i. vol. iv. p. 415.

with his servant Valeria, thereby obtaining admission to the house of Alfonsus, with whose daughter Phylema he is in love; the Duke of Cestus, father of Aurelio, is substituted for Philogano; and Philotus, a merchant, takes the place of the personating Siennese in the *Suppositi.* As to what is original in the conception of the play, Shakespeare's inimitable vein of comic characterisation displays itself in the slight but firm sketches of Ferando, the prototype of Petruchio, and of Sandar, who, in *The Taming of* THE *Shrew*, is developed into Grumio. All the scenes of the taming in that comedy—the "beef and mustard episode," with those of the tailor, the question as to the time of day, as to the moon and sun, and as to the sex of the Duke of Cestus (or Vincentio)—appear in the early play; so, too, does the final wager as to the obedience of the wives; moreover, a good deal of the dialogue of the older play is transplanted without alteration into *The Taming of* THE *Shrew.*

Turning from the play to the Induction, we feel the first stirring of the serene and beautiful imagination which at a later date created the atmosphere of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream.* The idea of this part of the work was suggested by a story called *The Waking Man's Dream*, the incidents of which are related as having happened to Philip, Duke of Burgundy, though they are only an adaptation of the tale of Abou Hassan in the *Arabian Nights.* That profound sense of earthly vanity which pervades all Shakespeare's dramatic writings is graphically expressed in the opening of the story, and as it may have been this moral tradition, inherited from the *Gesta Romanorum*, that first touched the poet's philosophical imagination, I here transcribe the passage:—

What hath our pride and pomp availed us? say those poor miserable souls shut up in the infernal prisons; where is our bravery become, and the glorious show of our magnificence? all these things are passed like a flying shadow, or as a post who hastens to his journey's end. This is it which caused the ancient comic poet to say that the world was nothing but an universal comedy, because all the passages thereof serve to make the

wisest laugh; and according to the opinion of Democritus, all that is acted on this great theatre of the whole world differs in nothing from that which has been acted on a player's stage: the mirror which I will here set before your eyes will so lively express all these inventions, and so truly show the vanities of all the greatness and opulencies of the earth, that although in these events I gather not either examples not far distant from our times, or that have been published by any other writer, yet I believe that the serious pleasantness of this one will supply its want of novelty, and that its repetition will neither be unfruitful nor unpleasing.[1]

It is to be noted that the idea of vanity runs all through *The Taming of A Shrew*, in which play Christopher Sly continues to comment on the action almost up to the close, when, having again fallen asleep, he is conveyed back to the spot from which he was taken, to marvel on awaking at the distinctness of his dream: in the revised *Taming of THE Shrew*, on the other hand, Sly is represented as on the point of falling asleep at the end of the first scene of the first act, after which we see no more of him.

In the dramatic representation of the unreality of things, Shakespeare, as I have said, had been anticipated by Lyly. But both in this and in the other points that have been mentioned his genius is still seen in embryo. The episode of Sly in *The Taming of A Shrew* wants altogether the rich colouring and admirable chiaroscuro which give such an air of truth and poetry to the later Induction. Still more unsatisfactory is the management of the plot of the play. No explanation is given of the necessity of the exchange of identities between the master Aurelio and the servant Valeria; the latter, after agreeing to personate the Duke of Cestus's son, is introduced, without any adequate reason, as a teacher of music into the house of Alfonsus; there is nothing to account for the personation of Aurelio's supposed father by the merchant Philotus; there is no inducement in the way of dowry to attract Ferando, the original of Petruchio, to marry Kate. When Shakespeare came to judge his play with mature experience, he saw in how many points

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iv. p. 408.

it violated the law of probability, and how inferior in this respect it was to its model the *Suppositi* of Ariosto. In transforming the comedy, he accordingly took great pains to rectify these mistakes, and with such success that, in *The Taming of* THE *Shrew*, there is no fault to be found with the reasons for Lucentio's (Aurelio's) change of character with Tranio (Valeria), or with the manner in which the former obtains an opportunity of intercourse with Bianca (Phylema). All that part of the *Suppositi* relating to the arrival of Erostrato's (Aurelio's, afterwards Lucentio's) father, which had been originally slurred over, is now carefully worked out; the reason for Petruchio's (Ferando's) wooing becomes apparent; and his character, with that of his servant Grumio (Sandar), is made clear, forcible, and consistent.

Passing from *The Taming of* A *Shrew* to *The Comedy of Errors*, we observe a very close connection in thought between the two plays, but a very decided advance in dramatic skill in the later composition. This we know for certain was written before 1598: the versification, which in parts has some resembl[illegible] the metre of the Moralities, suggests that it p[illegible] *Midsummer-Night's Dream*; and for other [illegible] be pre[illegible] noticed, it may be taken as a [illegible] ction[illegible]

Puritan divines to deal with cases of persons supposed to be possessed)—all this indicates what a stride in dramatic invention had been made by the poet since his first essay in comedy.

But, as is the case in *The Taming of A Shrew*, the most interesting feature in *The Comedy of Errors*, viewed historically, is its illustration of the manner in which Shakespeare learned from the art of earlier poets to produce that unreal and poetical atmosphere which is the great charm of what may be called his Comedies of Illusion. The most imaginative comic effect in this play is the state of mind produced respectively in Antipholus and in Dromio of Syracuse by the unexpected treatment they receive from the inhabitants of Ephesus. The slave simply doubts his own identity. When claimed by the Ephesian cook-maid as her lover, he runs away till he meets his master:—

ANT. SYR. Why, how now, Dromio! where runn'st thou so fast?
DRO. S. Do you know me, sir? am I Dromio? am I your man? am I myself?
ANT. S. Thou art Dromio, thou art my man, thou art thyself.
DRO. S. I am an ass, I am a woman's man, and beside myself.[1]

Antipholus, equally perplexed, is more subtle in his reasoning. After being addressed by Adriana, his brother's wife, as her husband, he asks:—

> Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
> Sleeping or waking? mad or well advised?
> Known unto these, and to myself disguised!
> I'll say as they say, and persever so,
> And in this mist at all adventures go.[2]

Aftewards he ascribes his adventures to the witchcraft of the city:—

> There's not a man I meet but doth salute me
> As if I were their well-acquainted friend;
> And every one doth call me by my name.
> Some tender money to me; some invite me;

[1] *Comedy of Errors*, Act iii. Sc. 2.
[2] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 2.

> Some other give me thanks for kindnesses;
> Some offer me commodities to buy:
> Even now a tailor called me in his shop,
> And showed me silks that he had bought for me,
> And therewithal took measure of my body.
> Sure, these are but imaginary wiles,
> And Lapland sorcerers inhabit here.[1]

Finally, he is driven to desperation; while Dromio, who has become reconciled to the situation, as is natural to his grosser nature, is quite ready to stay in the city of witches.

> ANT. S. I see these witches are afraid of swords.
> DRO. S. She that would be your wife now ran from you.
> ANT. S. Come to the Centaur; fetch our stuff from thence:
> I long that we were safe and sound aboard.
> DRO. S. Faith, stay here this night; they will surely do us no harm: *you saw they speak us fair, give us gold: methinks they are* such a gentle nation that, but for the mountain of mad flesh that claims marriage of me, I could find in my heart to stay here still and turn witch.
> ANT. S. I will not stay to-night for all the town;
> *Therefore away, to get our stuff aboard.*[2]

To represent a man so puzzled as to doubt about his own identity was a conception well within the reach of the ancient comic dramatist; and Plautus had furnished an example of it in the Sosia of his *Amphitruo*, which had been crudely copied in the Jenkin Careaway of the old Morality, *Jack Juggler*.[3] But the more spiritual form of illusion found in *The Comedy of Errors*, as in the Induction to *The Taming of a Shrew*, is entirely mediæval, and was imported into those plays by Shakespeare from the examples furnished to him in Lyly's *Endimion*, in which the action is affected by the agency of fairies, witches, enchanted fountains, and human beings transformed into trees.

From Lyly, too, Shakespeare took the idea of the

[1] *Comedy of Errors*, Act iv. Sc. 3.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 4.
[3] SOSIA. . . Di immortales, obsecro vestram fidem,
Ubi ego perii? ubi immutatus sum? ubi ego formam perdidi?
An egomet me illic reliqui, si forte oblitus fui?
Nam hic quidem omnem imaginem meam, quæ antehac fuerat,
possidet.—*Amphitruo*, Act i. Sc. 1. 293.
Compare vol. ii. p. 355.

underplot, in which some well-marked character, not absolutely necessary to the evolution of the main plot, is brought on the stage to amuse the audience with his oddities and witty abuse of language. In *The Comedy of Errors* this part is filled by Dromio of Syracuse, and the following specimen of dialogue, entirely different in style from anything in *The Taming of A Shrew*, will, when compared with the extract I have given from *Mydas*,[1] furnish ample evidence of the cause of the change in Shakespeare's comic manner:—

DRO. S. Well, sir, I thank you.
ANT. S. Thank me, sir! for what?
DRO. S. Marry, sir, for this something that you gave me for nothing.
ANT. S. I'll make you amends next, to give you nothing for something. But say, sir, is it dinner-time?
DRO. S. No, sir: I think the meat wants that I have.
ANT. S. In good time, sir; what's that?
DRO. S. Basting.
ANT. S. Well, sir, then 'twill be dry.
DRO. S. If it be, sir, I pray you, eat none of it.
ANT. S. Your reason?
DRO. S. Lest it make you choleric and purchase me another dry basting.
ANT. S. Well, sir, learn to jest in good time: there's a time for all things.
DRO. S. I durst have denied that, before you were so choleric.
ANT. S. By what rule, sir?
DRO. S. Marry, sir, by a rule as plain as the plain bald pate of father Time himself.
ANT. S. Let's hear it.
DRO. S. There's no time for a man to recover his hair that grows bald by nature.
ANT. S. May he not do it by fine and recovery?
DRO. S. Yes, to pay a fine for a periwig, and to recover the lost hair of another man.
ANT. S. Why is Time such a niggard of hair, being, as it is, so plentiful an excrement?
DRO. S. Because it is a blessing that he bestows on beasts; and what he hath scanted men in hair he hath given them in wit.
ANT. S. Why, but there's many a man hath more hair than wit.
DRO. S. Not a man of those but he hath the wit to lose his hair.
ANT. S. Why, thou didst conclude hairy men plain dealers without wit.

[1] See p. 73.

DRO S. The plainer dealer, the sooner lost; yet he loseth it in a kind of jollity.

ANT. S. For what reason?

DRO. S For two; and sound ones too.

ANT. S. Nay, not sound, I pray you.

DRO. S. Sure ones then.

ANT. S. Nay, not sure, in a thing falsing.

DRO. S. Certain ones then.

ANT. S Name them.

DRO. S. The one, to save the money that he spends in tiring; the other that at dinner they should not drop in his porridge.

ANT. S. You would all this time have proved there is no time for all things.

DRO. S. Marry, and did, sir; namely, no time to recover hair lost by nature.

ANT. S. But your reason was not substantial, why there is no time to recover.

DRO. S. Thus I mend it: Time himself is bald and therefore to the world's end will have bald followers.

ANT. S. I knew 'twould be a bald conclusion.[1]

Love's Labour's Lost marks a further stage of comic invention. This play, which is among those mentioned by Meres in 1598, is recorded as having been acted as early as 1597; and though this was probably not the first representation, yet since all the characteristics of Lyly's style are carried in it to a very high point of development, it is reasonable to suppose that it was written after the *Comedy of Errors;* on the other hand as, like that play, it contains passages in the lumbering metre of the Moralities, it may be set down as anterior to *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, in which this style completely disappears. The poet, in respect of plot and action, is seen to be gradually departing from the principle of the New Comedy, whether in its Latin or Italian form, but to have not yet arrived at the romantic principle on which he constructed his later plays. As to what was suggested to him by external stories, we can only say that the negotiation between the Courts of France and Navarre respecting the sale of territory is historical;[2] otherwise, most of the incidents seem to be of his own invention. The complication of

[1] *Comedy of Errors*, Act ii. Sc. 2 Compare extract from *Mydas*, pp. 73-74.
[2] See Collier's *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. i. p. 1.

the plot, unlike that of the *Comedy of Errors*, is extremely simple, being produced partly by the devices of the leading personages to escape from the consequences of a rash vow, partly by the assuming of disguises and the misdelivery of letters. On the other hand, there is a great advance in the power of character-drawing. The persons of the witty Biron, the extravagant Armado, the pedantic Holofernes, and the stupidly-conceited Costard, are all firmly sketched, and give promise of the finer execution afterwards attained in such characters as Benedick, Malvolio, and Dogberry. They are, however, taken from a comparatively narrow range of observation, and all the strength of the dramatist is thrown into his dialogue.

Love's Labour's Lost may, in fact, be regarded as a study of absurdity in the abuse of language, intentional or unintentional, by all orders of society, from the courtier to the clown. Lyly's euphuistic manner is partly imitated as in itself a species of comic wit, and partly ridiculed as an exhibition of human folly; the various examples of courtly, scholastic, and rustic pedantry are contrasted with each other in the nicest gradations. In each form of speech, however, the influence of *Euphues* is apparent. The chivalrous idea of gallantry, inherited from the Courts of Love, and modified by Lyly, animates the combats of wit between Biron, on the one side, and Boyet and the ladies on the other; the love sonnets resemble some of Shakespeare's own in the euphuistic extravagance of their metaphor; while the logical and verbal conceits, which Lyly had brought into fashion, are illustrated in the following speech of Biron :—

> The king he is hunting the deer; I am coursing myself: they have pitched a toil; I am toiling in a pitch,—pitch that defiles: defile! a foul word. Well, set thee down, sorrow! for so they say the fool said, and so say I, and I the fool: well proved, wit! By the Lord, this love is as mad as Ajax: it kills sheep; it kills me, I a sheep: well proved again o' my side! etc., etc.[1]

Euphues' ridiculous precision is amusingly hit off in

[1] *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act iv. Sc. 3.

Don Armado, who, with his page Moth, is, I think, certainly an improved version of Sir Tophas and his page, Epiton, in Lyly's *Endimion.* The lofty gravity, with which the Spaniard proclaims his passion for the stolid Jaquenetta, is a curious anticipation—though the absurdity takes a different form—of Don Quixote and his Dulcinea: —

I do affect the very ground, which is base, where her shoe, which is baser, guided by her foot, which is basest, doth tread. I shall be forsworn, which is a great argument of falsehood, if I love. And how can that be true love which is falsely attempted? Love is a familiar; Love is a devil: there is no evil angel but Love. Yet was Samson so tempted, and he had an excellent strength; yet was Solomon so seduced, and he had a very good wit. Cupid's butt-shaft is too hard for Hercules' club; and therefore too much odds for a Spaniard's rapier. The first and second cause will not serve my turn; the passado he respects not, the duello he regards not: his disgrace is to be called boy; but his glory is to subdue men. Adieu, valour! rust, rapier! be still, drum! for your manager is in love; yea, he loveth. Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise, wit; write, pen; for I am for whole volumes in folio.[1]

In *Love's Labour's Lost* the underplot is brought into great prominence. Don Armado is the pivot on which it turns, but many other characters revolve round him, of whom perhaps, the most notable is Holofernes, the schoolmaster, a person reflecting in a ridiculous form the conceit of the schoolmen at the Universities. There is considerable humour in the dialogue between this pedant, his admirer, Sir Nathaniel, the curate, and Dull, the constable:—

DULL. You two are book-men; can you tell me by your wit
What was a month old at Cain's birth, that's not five weeks old as yet?
HOLOFERNES. Dictynna, goodman Dull; Dictynna, goodman Dull.
DULL. What is Dictynna?
NATHANIEL. A title of Phœbe, to Luna, to the moon.
HOL. The moon was a month old when Adam was no more,
And raught not to five weeks when he came to five-score.
The allusion holds in the exchange.
DULL. 'Tis true indeed; the collusion holds good in the exchange.

[1] *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act i. Sc. 2.

HOL. God comfort thy capacity! I say, the allusion holds in the exchange.

DULL. And I say, the pollusion holds in the exchange; for the moon is never but a month old: and I say besides, 'twas a pricket that the princess killed.

HOL. Sir Nathaniel, will you hear an extemporal epitaph on the death of the deer? And, to humour the ignorant, call I the deer the princess killed a pricket.

NATH. Perge, good master Holofernes, perge; so shall it please you to abrogate scurrility.

HOL. I will something affect the letter, for it argues facility.
The preyful princess pierced and pricked a pretty pleasing pricket;
Some say a sore; but not a sore, till now made sore with shooting.
The dogs did yell: put L to sore, then sorel jumps from thicket;
Or pricket sore, or else sorel; the people fall a-hooting.
If sore be sore, then L to sore makes fifty sores one sorel.
Of one sore I an hundred make by adding but one more L.

NATH. A rare talent.

DULL (*aside*). If a talent be a claw, look how he claws him with a talent.

HOL. This is a gift that I have, simple, simple; a foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions: these are begot in the ventricle of a memory, nourished in the womb of pia mater, and delivered upon the mellowing of occasion. But the gift is good in those in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it.

NATH. I praise the Lord for you: and so may my parishioners; for their sons are very well tutored by you, and their daughters profit very greatly under you: you are a good member of the commonwealth.

HOL. Mehercle, if their sons are ingenuous, they shall want no instruction; if their daughters are capable, I will put it to them: but vir sapit qui pauca loquitur.[1]

Although the confusions arising from illiterate punctuation had been comically represented in *Ralph Roister Doister*,[2] I am not aware that the blunders in language of rustics had been made the subject of ridicule on any stage before Dull and Costard started a tradition which

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Enter the Watch.

DARES. But I pray, sirs, may we see Endimion?

2nd WATCHMAN. No, we are commanded in Cynthia's name that no man see him.

SAMIAS. No man? Why, we are but boys.

1st WATCHMAN. Man, neighbours, he says true; for if I swear I will never drink my liquor by the quart, and yet call for two pints, I think with a safe conscience I may carouse both.

DAR. Pithily, and to the purpose.

2nd WATCH Tush, tush, neighbours, take me with you.

SAM. This will grow hot.

DAR. Let them alone.

2nd WATCH. If I say to my wife, Wife I will have no raisins in my pudding, she put in currants; small raisins are raisins, and boys are men. Even as my wife have put no raisins in my pudding, so shall no boys see Endimion.

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MASTER CONSTABLE. You know, neighbours, 'tis an old-said saw, *Children and fools speak true.*

ALL. True.

MASTER CONSTABLE. Well, there you see the men to be fools, because it is provided from the children.

DAR. Good.

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EPI. O wicked application!

SAM. Sincerely brought about.

1st WATCH. Nay, he says true: and, therefore, till Cynthia have been here he shall not be uncovered. Therefore, away!

DAR. A watch, quoth you? A man may watch seven years for a wise word, and yet go without it. Their wits are as rusty as their bills[1]

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I now come to what is, historically, a very interesting play, as it marks a turning-point in Shakespeare's poetical career. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was first published in the folio of 1623, but we are unable to determine accurately the date of its earliest representation on the stage; though, as it is mentioned by Meres, we know that it must have been acted before 1598. Looking to the direct imitation of Lyly's style in parts of it, I imagine that it must, broadly speaking, have belonged to the same period as *Love's Labour's Lost*; but I take it to have been written later, because the principle of romance for the first time enters into the plot, and also because the character of Launce is a more finished study in comic euphuism than such characters of low life as Costard and Dull. On the other hand, I think it likely that it preceded *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, because in the latter play the element of euphuism is entirely subordinated to the comic situation brought about by the fairy machinery. Otherwise there is an obvious similarity in poetical principle between *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and portions of both the other dramas I have mentioned, which are themselves also akin in spirit to *The Comedy of Errors*. The poet in all these plays finds his comic motive in the confusions and cross-purposes of life; but while in *The Comedy of Errors* confusions are brought about by a freak of nature, and in *Love's Labour's Lost* either by the natural stupidity or the deliberate artifices of men, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* the main complication is caused by the serious agency of love.

This play is, in fact, the first of Shakespeare's tragicomedies, and also the first in which he reflects deeply on the nature of a passion which, above all others, discloses the frailties of the human will. On the one hand, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* touches the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, which it also resembles in the poetical euphuism of its style; on the other, it is the precursor of that series of dramatic romances with a happy ending, comprising *The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure,*

and *The Winter's Tale.* The tragic element appears in the corrupting influence of selfish passion on the character of Proteus, and in the pathetic situation of the injured Julia. In this character the romance of the play centres. The story is suggested by the *Diana Enamorada;* but, when Julia is compared with Viola in *Twelfth Night,* we see how gradually Shakespeare arrived at his final conception of the self-devotion which is the crowning beauty of woman. What seems mainly to have impressed him in the idea of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* as afterwards in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream,* is the contrariety in the fortunes of true love. This is made apparent in the speech of Julia, when she has undertaken to fetch Silvia's picture for Proteus—the climax of the romance:—

> How many women would do such a message?
> Alas, poor Proteus! thou hast entertained
> A fox to be the shepherd of thy lambs.
> Alas, poor fool! why do I pity him
> That with his very heart despiseth me?
> Because he loves her, he despiseth me;
> Because I love him, I must pity him.
> This ring I gave him when he parted from me,
> *To bind him to remember my good will;*
> And now am I, unhappy messenger,
> To plead for that which I would not obtain,
> *To carry that which I would have refused,*
> To praise his faith which I would have dispraised?
> I am my master's true-confirmed love,
> But cannot be true servant to my master,
> *Unless I prove false traitor to myself.*
> Yet will I woo for him, but yet so coldly
> As, heaven it knows, I would not have him speed.[1]

The dramatic interest, therefore, lies in the external complexity of the situation, not, as in *Twelfth Night,* in the complete self-surrender of the will, illustrated by the impassioned pleading of Viola to Olivia on behalf of the Duke.

The comic element in the play is developed, in the underplot, by means of the characters of the two servants Launce and Speed. These are modelled on the characters of Licio and Petulus, in Lyly's *Mydas;* and one scene is imitated directly from that play, as may be seen from a

[1] *Two Gentlemen of Verona,* Act. iv Sc. 4.

comparison between the soliloquy of Launce, beginning, "I am but a fool, look you," and followed by the dialogue between himself and Speed (in which there is a catalogue of his mistress's qualities) and the conversation between Licio and Petulus, as, for example:

LICIO. But, sirrha, for thy better instruction I will unfold every wrinkle of my mistress' disposition.
PETULUS. I pray thee do.
LIC. But for this time I will only handle the head and purtenance.
PET. Nothing else?
LIC. Why, will not that be a long hour's work to describe that is almost a whole day's work to dress?
PET. Proceed.
LIC. First, she hath a head as round as a tennis ball,
Etc. Etc.[1]

After which they proceed to entertain the audience with a display of verbal repartee in the—it must be confessed—eminently tedious vein of Shakespeare's two servants. The wit of Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is grounded on what Speed calls "your old vice still: mistake the word": Speed's talent lies in bringing his logic to absurd conclusions: both are dramatic inventions of the author of *Euphues*.

In other respects the play exhibits, germinally, many of the characteristics of Shakespeare's finest work. The poet's power of bringing together materials from different quarters is conspicuously displayed. Besides his obligations to the *Diana Enamorada*, Sidney's *Arcadia* furnishes him with two suggestions: the close friendship between Valentine and Proteus, imitated from the friendship between Pyrochles and Musidorus; and the election of Valentine to be captain of the outlaws, as Pyrochles in the *Arcadia* is chosen leader of the Helots. With this romantic atmosphere are also very happily blended allusions to actual life, as in the description Panthino gives of the habits of modern travel among the English aristocracy:—

Men of slender reputation
Put forth their sons to seek preferment out:
Some to the wars, to try their fortune there;

[1] Lilly's *Dramatic Works* (Fairholt), vol. ii. p. 11.

> Some to discover islands far away;
> Some to the studious universities.[1]

The humours of the servants afford a pleasant contrast to the misfortunes of the leading personages. On the *other hand*, the structure of the play is somewhat feeble. The underplot—if the conversations between Launce and Speed can be so called—is connected very slenderly with the main plot; and the principal action itself is not developed in such a manner as to explain the extraordinary inconsistencies of character; there is, for example, nothing to render probable the depths of baseness and treachery to which Proteus suddenly sinks in his passion for Silvia; still more unnatural is his abrupt reconversion to virtue; most incredible of all, the offer of Valentine to resign the love of his mistress in favour of his mean-spirited friend.

In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* Shakespeare's comedy attained the perfection of the art of producing laughter by the misfortunes of mortals arising out of confusion and error. The plot of this play combines three elements of confusion: the mistakes about persons represented in *The Comedy of Errors;* the cross-purposes of lovers represented in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona;* the misuse of words and logic, ridiculed both in the latter play and in *Love's Labour's Lost;* but a supernatural element fusing all these principles in one, and controlling the whole machinery of the drama, is now introduced by the introduction of fairy agents. The art and finish of this most lovely play argue it to be a later production than those we have already examined, and though we have no certain record to determine the date of its composition, it may with some confidence be assigned to 1595 or 1596, since the speech of Titania about the disordered course of the seasons was doubtless inspired by the extraordinary conditions of the weather in the years 1594 and 1595. In the masterly execution of the general design, Shakespeare's obligations to Lyly are fully apparent. I have said that the atmosphere of dream and

[1] *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act i. Sc. 3.

illusion, introduced in the Induction to *The Taming of A Shrew*, is to be found first in the plays of the elder poet; even the suggestion of Bottom and the elves is anticipated in a scene of *Endimion* in which a company of fairies surround and pinch a loutish character called Corsites.[1] In the cold moonlight of Lyly's fancy these detached episodes produce little effect; but Shakespeare's supreme imagination understood how to combine them, and to people the world of dreams with invisible beings, affecting with their freaks the fortunes of the mortal actors. The materials for his creation lay immediately before him in the superstitions of the country, but hitherto the "spark from heaven" had been wanting to call into existence the court of Oberon and Titania.

Lyly, again, had furnished Shakespeare with the idea of the underplot contrasted with the principal plot, and the latter had advanced considerably on the invention of his master in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; but the humours of pedantic or ignorant persons in these earlier comedies are introduced almost irrelevantly; they are now woven in an admirably artistic manner into the texture of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, so felicitously anticipated at the opening, helps to connect the action at once with the complications occasioned by the fortunes of the two pairs of lovers, and with the loyal exhibition of Bottom and his friends; the fairy machinery in the same way is employed to confound equally the intentions of the principal actors and those of the performers in the rustic drama. The question has been asked why the play should be called *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; since the time is not midsummer, and the main action is a reality; indeed, Shakespeare himself seems to have felt that he must reckon with prosy criticism of this kind, for he supplies an answer, conceived in the spirit of Lyly, in the Epilogue:—

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumbered here

[1] Lilly's *Dramatic Works* (Fairholt), vol. i. p. 57.

> While these visions did appear.
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream,
> Gentles, do not reprehend—

an argument implying that the essence of the comedy lies in the fairy machinery, which explains the course of affairs to the spectators, but not to the actors. So admirably is the action managed, that the elves are visible to none of the mortals except Bottom, who, as becomes his character accepts the facts of his "translation" with the fine composure of Christopher Sly under slightly different circumstances. The *dénouement* of the play, as well as its complication, depends on the will of the elves; the misfortunes they bring about last for the night; but "joy cometh in the morning": everything therefore that passes may be considered as much a dream as was the play of *The Taming of A Shrew* to the hero of its Induction.

Not less beautiful is the vein of feeling which connects the underplot, representing the performance of the absurd interlude, with the idea of illusion pervading the play itself. The device of the Induction to *The Taming of A Shrew* is here inverted, Theseus being made to choose for his entertainment the drama of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, in a speech of the finest humanity, which shows with what admirable skill Shakespeare had transplanted both the idea of comic incongruity and the classicalism of Lyly from the sphere of mere words into the region of life and emotion:—

> THESEUS. [*Reads*] "The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung
> By an Athenian eunuch to the harp"
> We'll none of that: that have I told my love,
> . . .
> . .
> That is an old device; and it was played
> When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.
> [*Reads*] "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
> Of Learning, late deceased in beggary."
> That is some satire, keen and critical,
> Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.
> [*Reads*] "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

illusion, introduced in the Induction to *The Taming of A Shrew*, is to be found first in the plays of the elder poet; even the suggestion of Bottom and the elves is anticipated in a scene of *Endimion* in which a company of fairies surround and pinch a loutish character called Corsites.[1] In the cold moonlight of Lyly's fancy these detached episodes produce little effect; but Shakespeare's supreme imagination understood how to combine them, and to people the world of dreams with invisible beings, affecting with their freaks the fortunes of the mortal actors. The materials for his creation lay immediately before him in the superstitions of the country, but hitherto the "spark from heaven" had been wanting to call into existence the court of Oberon and Titania.

Lyly, again, had furnished Shakespeare with the idea of the underplot contrasted with the principal plot, and the latter had advanced considerably on the invention of his master in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; but the humours of pedantic or ignorant persons in these earlier comedies are introduced almost irrelevantly; they are now woven in an admirably artistic manner into the texture of the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta, so felicitously anticipated at the opening, helps to connect the action at once with the complications occasioned by the fortunes of the two pairs of lovers, and with the loyal exhibition of Bottom and his friends; the fairy machinery in the same way is employed to confound equally the intentions of the principal actors and those of the performers in the rustic drama. The question has been asked why the play should be called *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; since the time is not midsummer, and the main action is a reality; indeed, Shakespeare himself seems to have felt that he must reckon with prosy criticism of this kind, for he supplies an answer, conceived in the spirit of Lyly, in the Epilogue:—

> If we shadows have offended,
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumbered here

[1] Lilly's *Dramatic Works* (Fairholt), vol. i. p. 57.

While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend—

an argument implying that the essence of the comedy lies in the fairy machinery, which explains the course of affairs to the spectators, but not to the actors. So admirably is the action managed, that the elves are visible to none of the mortals except Bottom, who, as becomes his character accepts the facts of his "translation" with the fine composure of Christopher Sly under slightly different circumstances. The *dénouement* of the play, as well as its complication, depends on the will of the elves; the misfortunes they bring about last for the night; but "joy cometh in the morning": everything therefore that passes may be considered as much a dream as was the play of *The Taming of a Shrew* to the hero of its Induction.

Not less beautiful is the vein of feeling which connects the underplot, representing the performance of the absurd interlude, with the idea of illusion pervading the play itself. The device of the Induction to *The Taming of a Shrew* is here inverted, Theseus being made to choose for his entertainment the drama of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, in a speech of the finest humanity, which shows with what admirable skill Shakespeare had transplanted both the idea of comic incongruity and the classicalism of Lyly from the sphere of mere words into the region of life and emotion:—

THESEUS. [*Reads*] "The battle with the Centaurs, to be sung
By an Athenian eunuch to the harp"
We'll none of that: that have I told my love,
In glory of my kinsman Hercules.
[*Reads*] "The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals,
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage"
That is an old device; and it was played
When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.
[*Reads*] "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
Of Learning, late deceased in beggary."
That is some satire, keen and critical,
Not sorting with a nuptial ceremony.
[*Reads*] "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus

And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth."
Merry and tragical! tedious and brief!
That is, hot ice and wondrous strange snow.
How shall we find the concord of this discord?

PHILOSTRATE. A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
Which is as brief as I have known a play;
But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
Which makes it tedious; for in all the play
There is not one word apt, one player fitted;
And tragical, my noble lord, it is;
For Pyramus therein doth kill himself.
Which, when I saw rehearsed, I must confess
Made mine eyes water; but more merry tears
The passion of loud laughter never shed.

THE. What are they that do play it?

PHIL. Hard-handed men that work in Athens here,
Which never laboured in their minds till now,
And now have toiled their unbreathed memories
With this same play, against your nuptial.

THE. And we will hear it.

PHIL. No, my noble lord;
It is not for you: I have heard it over,
And it is nothing, nothing in the world;
Unless you can find sport in their intents,
Extremely stretched and conned with cruel pain,
To do you service.

THE. I will hear that play,
For never anything can be amiss,
When simpleness and duty tender it.
Go, bring them in: and take your places, ladies.[1]

A similar vein of euphuistic wit runs through the comments of the spectators of the play, always, however, mitigated with the same humane consideration, arising out of a sense of human vanity, on the part of Theseus, as, for example:—

HIPPOLYTA. This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.

THESEUS. The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.

HIP. It must be your imagination then, not theirs.

THE. If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men.[2]

In many respects *The Tempest* is a companion drama

[1] *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act v. Sc. 1.
[2] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 1.

to *A Midsummer-Night's Dream.* Very conflicting opinions, however, have been formed as to the date of the composition of the former play. It is first mentioned, under its present name, as having been acted before James I. on All-Hallows Night in 1611; and though this fact does not in itself prove the comedy to have been then a new one, Malone set it down to the year 1610, supposing it to have been suggested by the shipwreck of Sir George Somers and Sir Thomas Gates in the Bermudas in 1609, the story of which had been told in Sil Jourdan's *Discovery of the Bermudas*, published in 1610. To this hypothesis there are some very strong objections. In the first place, the spirit pervading the play is quite different from the poetical motives of any of the dramas known to have been the late work of Shakespeare—*King Lear, Macbeth, Timon, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra;* on the other hand, it is closely akin in sentiment to the genius of the cycle beginning with *The Taming of A Shrew.* Nor, again, is there anything in Sil Jourdan's narrative which can be confidently regarded as having furnished a suggestion for any passage in *The Tempest;* contrarily, there are several allusions in the latter which can be best explained by reference to Sir Walter Raleigh's pamphlet, entitled, *A Discoverie of the large rich and beautiful Empire of Guiana*, published in 1596. But the strongest argument against the date assigned by Malone is the fact that the play appears to be plainly alluded to by Ben Jonson in the prologue to *Every Man in his Humour*, first acted in the November of 1596, in which, by way of protest against the taste of the day, he says:—

> He rather prays you will be pleased to see
> One such to-day as other plays should be;
> Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,
> Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please,
> Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeard
> The gentlewomen; nor rolled bullet hear'd
> To say, it thunders; nor tempestuous drum
> Rumbles, to tell you when the storm doth come.
>
> . . . . . .

> I mean such errors as you'll all confess
> By laughing at them they deserve no less,
> Which when you've heartily done, there's hope left then
> You that have so graced monsters, may like men.

Who can doubt that Jonson is here discharging his critical spleen against the Masque in *The Tempest*; the opening scene of the shipwreck in that play, and the person of Caliban? Hence I am of the opinion of Joseph Hunter who, in an admirable dissertation on *The Tempest*, concludes that it was first acted as early as 1596.[1] He is, I think, successful in disposing of all objections to his theory except one, which he does not seem to have noticed, namely, that the metrical style of the play, *as we have it*, is, in many parts, completely different not only from the style of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, but even from that of plays certainly composed several years later, such as *As You Like It* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. In these, as in all the early plays of Shakespeare, in which the influence of Marlowe prevails, the movement of the verse is swift and flowing, the period being generally extended, with a pause at the end of each line, through three or four verses together; in *The Tempest*, on the contrary, as in most of the plays from *King Lear* onwards (above all in *Coriolanus*), the diction is sometimes (though not always) harsh, abrupt, and even violent; the sentences end in the middle of lines; the cæsura often involves a superfluous syllable; while the subordinate clauses of the sentence are sometimes protracted to within a single syllable of the close of the line. I do not think that any one could read carefully *The Merchant of Venice* after *The Tempest*, and (judging solely by the language) come to the conclusion that the two plays were, from beginning to end, the work of the same period. Yet, if we may argue from Jonson's prologue before cited, *The Tempest* in some form must have been then in existence.

This apparent contradiction may be explained if we accept Hunter's hypothesis that *The Tempest* was first produced under the title of *Love's Labour Won*, a play

[1] Hunter's *New Illustrations of Shakespeare*, vol. i. p. 130.

of Shakespeare mentioned by Meres in 1598. It is most unlikely that any play written by Shakespeare should have entirely disappeared; on the other hand, nothing would have been more natural than for the poet to select for his comedy, when first written, a name both corresponding with the title of the antecedent *Love's Labour's Lost*, and fixing the centre of interest in the severe probation imposed by Prospero on Ferdinand to test his love for Miranda.[1] Perhaps the play was not so popular as some of his others, and either for this reason, or from some critical preference of his own, when it was revived in 1611, he may have taken advantage of the general interest felt in Somers' shipwreck to alter the name, and, after his usual fashion, to re-write some portions of it in his latest manner. Whatever alterations in detail he made in the play, he doubtless preserved the original structure unaltered, for it is pervaded by the same fairy-like imagination as *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and the same key-note of sentiment is sounded:—

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep

Whereas, however, in the earlier play the comic effects are produced by elvish tricks—

> Those things do best please me
> Which befals preposterously—

in *The Tempest* the illusions of the world are made the text for a profounder philosophy:—

> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind.[2]

Puck is replaced by Prospero; the magic powers of fairyland are beneficently used. A deeper ethical significance

[1] See *The Tempest*, Act iii. Sc. 1, Act. iv. Sc. 1, and compare Hunter's *New Illustrations of Shakespeare*, vol. i. pp. 130-135.
[2] *The Tempest*, Act iv. Sc. 1.

elevates the tone of *The Tempest*. In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* the *dénouement* consists in the unravelling of the transient misfortunes of lovers: in *The Tempest* a way is found out of a tangled web of suffering woven by deceit, treachery, and ingratitude. A sense of guilt and remorse finds utterance in the mouths of the human actors: forgiveness of injuries is the last word of the solution brought about by the delicate machinery of the supernatural *dramatis personæ*. Even the underplot has in it a touch of tragedy, and the drunken buffooneries of Trinculo and Stephano are rendered dangerous by their association with the murderous brutishness of Caliban.

In other respects the play, like *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, shows a marvellous advance in creative power since the poet's first attempt at ideal invention in the Induction to *The Taming of A Shrew*. Alike in the evolution of the plot and in the grouping of the characters, everything is now in perfect harmony with the ideal conditions of time and place. The enchanted island (possibly suggested to Shakespeare's imagination, as Mr. Hunter conjectures, by travellers' tales of Lampedusa), with its tradition of the sorceries of the foul witch, Sycorax; the noble figure of Prospero, potent over the spirits of the air, and standing in beautiful contrast, as well to the ignorance and purity of Miranda as to the unteachable bestiality of Caliban; the relations of these almost superhuman beings to the mixed crew of shipwrecked courtiers, servants, and sailors, so finely represented in their varied gradations of chivalry, guilty self-seeking, and clownish stupidity;—perhaps in no mortal work is the divine power of poetry in fusing the conflicting elements of imagination into an organic whole so conspicuously manifested. Not less admirable is the mature skill with which Shakespeare has employed in due degree the artistic devices he learned from his predecessors. In the nature of the plot we still feel the influence of the New Comedy; but, in the manner of unfolding it, Shakespeare shoots far beyond the art of Plautus; Lyly's influence is evident in the superhuman

surroundings of the action, but these are irradiated with a poetry of which Lyly was incapable: the conversation of the courtiers and the oddities of the persons of low life are modelled on the dialogue of the older poet in his Court comedies; but what was there mechanical and artificial is now made instinct with life; the painful verbal quibbling is discarded, and the humour seems to spring naturally out of the character and the situation. *The Tempest* is the crown of that portion of Shakespeare's comic work which is most directly inspired by the genius of the Middle Ages,—his Comedies of Illusion, as opposed to his Comedies of Romance.

With these Comedies of Illusion must be classed the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet.* Some critics, adopting the suggestion of Tyrwhitt, have supposed this play to have been written as early as 1591, because of the nurse's allusion—

> 'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years;[1]

the date of that event in England having been 1580. But this hypothesis involves an artistic impossibility (at least if we assume the text of 1591 to have been substantially identical with that of 1597); since we should have to suppose the whole character of Mercutio, his speech about Queen Mab, the smart euphuistic dialogue between him and Romeo, and the garrulous babble of the nurse, to have preceded such immature writing as we find in the *Contention between the Houses of York and Lancaster* and the *True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York.* It is evident, to any one who reflects, that the play is the production of a period when Shakespeare was developing the style of Lyly, and when his fancy was deeply coloured with the imagery of fairy mythology; it is therefore reasonable to place the date of its composition not far from *A Midsummer-Night's Dream;* a conjecture which is corroborated by the fact that the date of the first quarto containing the text of the play is 1597. The nurse is, in all proba-

[1] *Romeo and Juliet,* Act i Sc. 3

bility, alluding to the great earthquake near Verona in 1570, of which Shakespeare may well have heard without troubling himself more about the exact interval of time than was convenient for the scansion of his verse.

Romeo and Juliet marks the half-way stage between the tragic style which Shakespeare imitated from Marlowe, exhibiting the operation of *virtù*, and the later tragedies, marked by a strong ethical tendency, such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. The power of the human will in this play counts for little; it is swept away by the tide of passion and fate. An image of the world is presented to us as a whole, and in the vein of reflection pervading the prologue to the play, the chorus before the second act, and the occasional speeches of Friar Laurence, we observe the Greek tragic doctrine of moral necessity blended with the mediæval doctrine of human vanity. The fable is taken from one of those old-world stories which, first appearing in the Greek novels, gradually detached themselves and emerged in new shapes in the oral or written tales of the mediæval *trouvères*. Thus we trace its progress from the episode of the potion given to Anthia in Xenophon's *Love Adventures of Abrocomas and Anthia*, and her entombment, to the similar incidents reported in the *Roman de Cligés* of Chrestien de Troyes; thence it passes into the tales of Luigi da Porto, Bandello, and Belleforest in the sixteenth century, from which it once more migrates to England into Paynter's prose translation from Boisteau in *The Palace of Pleasure*, and into Arthur Brooke's poem (taken from the version of Bandello) published in 1562. Brooke says he had seen it "set forth on the stage with much more commendation than he could look for,"[1] and it seems by no means impossible that a fragment of the play he alludes to, a Latin one, still survives in MS.[2] It contains the characters of the nurse, Friar Laurence, Benvolio (Philophilus), and Tybalt, but not of Paris; and it has a chorus to moralise on the

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part 1, vol. i. p. 66.

[2] It is among the Sloane MSS. in the British Museum (No. 1775). See Hunter's *New Illustrations of Shakespeare*, vol. ii. p. 130.

progress of events. Brooke, very probably, took from this drama some ideas for his metrical story; Shakespeare certainly took the framework of his tragedy from the poem of Brooke. In this, as in the Latin play, we have a sketch of the Friar, learned in natural science, and of the character of the nurse, which, in the hands of the Latin dramatist, was of course an imitation of the nurse of Phædra, whether in the play of Euripides or Seneca. The character of Mercutio in Brooke is curious; he is represented as having "an icy hand," which Juliet contrasts with Romeo's; and he has none of the wit with which Shakespeare endows him: with these exceptions Shakespeare follows Brooke closely. In no other of his plays, except in *King Lear*, are we left with such an impression of the overmastering power of destiny; nevertheless, *Romeo and Juliet* is not wanting in a consolatory moral, which is set forth in the prologue:—

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Do with their death bury their parents' strife

How closely tragedy and comedy, in the subject of love, ran together in Shakespeare's imagination may be seen from a comparison between these lines and a passage in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*:—

> LYSANDER. Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
> Could ever hear by tale or history,
> The course of true love never did run smooth;
> But, either it was different in blood,—
> HERMIA. O cross! too high to be enthralled to low.
> LYS. Or else misgraffed in respect of years,—
> HER. O spite! too old to be engaged to young.
> LYS. Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,—
> HER. O hell! to choose love by another's eyes.
> LYS. Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
> War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,
> Making it momentany as a sound,

Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.[1]

The story of the two Veronese lovers aptly illustrates this universal truth, and the idea that their misfortunes are the result of destiny is forcibly brought out in the words of Friar Laurence after the tragic issue of his plans:—

Some greater power than we can contradict
Doth frustrate our intents.[2]

This sense of mortal impotence and vanity is further heightened by the skilful blending of comedy and tragedy; the death of the witty Mercutio; the vulgar babble of the nurse in the midst of calamity; the senile irritability with which old Capulet hurries his daughter to her fate. As regards the manner of expressing this mediæval feeling of the unreality of things, and the paradoxical ideas connected with the passion of love, the influence of Lyly is everywhere apparent in *Romeo and Juliet.* Euphuism pervades the amorous imagery of the play, and the extent to which the style is carried in the dialogue may be judged from the following combat of wit between Romeo and Mercutio:—

ROMEO. Pardon, good Mercutio, my business was great, and in such a case as mine a man may strain courtesy.

MERCUTIO. That's as much as to say, such a case as yours constrains a man to bow in the hams?

ROM. Meaning, to court'sy.

MER. Thou has most kindly hit it.

ROM. A most courteous exposition.

MER. Nay, I am the very pink of courtesy.

ROM. Pink for flower.

MER. Right.

ROM. Why, then is my pump well flowered.

MER. Well said: follow me this jest now till thou hast worn out

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[1] *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act i. Sc. 1.
[2] *Romeo and Juliet*, Act v. Sc. 3.

thy pump, that when the single sole of it is worn, the jest may remain after the wearing sole singular.

ROM. O single-soled jest, solely singular for thy singleness!

MER. Come between us, good Benvolio; my wits faint, etc., etc.[1]

While thus connected with the Comedies of Illusion, it will be seen that *Romeo and Juliet* is also very closely allied to the great group of tragi-comedies which Shakespeare was about to bring into being. It differs from these in its melancholy ending. The play is one peculiarly harrowing to the feelings, and will always be exposed on that account to the censure of that portion of every audience which, from the days of Aristotle downwards, has demanded in a drama the prospect of ultimate happiness for the actors Shakespeare might, if he had chosen, have secured (as Xenophon had done, and as he himself did in *Cymbeline* and *Measure for Measure*) for his hero and heroine a fortunate issue from their sufferings. That he determined otherwise is a signal proof of his judgment. For had the Friar's device succeeded, the death of Tybalt would have remained unavenged, and the conflict between the two houses must have continued. By the sacrifice of two true and innocent lovers a tragic propitiation is made for past guilt, and hereditary enmities are at once reproved and reconciled. The balance of good, arising out of an overwhelming evil, is an image of the laws of human life:—

> A *glooming peace* this morning with it brings;
> The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head·
> Go hence, to have more talk of these sad things;
> Some shall be pardoned, and some punished:
> For never was a story of more woe
> Than this of Juliet and her Romeo[2]

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II Sc. 4.
[2] *Ibid.* Act V. Sc. 3.

CHAPTER V

SHAKESPEARE'S LATER HISTORIES, ROMANTIC COMEDIES, AND TRAGI-COMEDIES

WE come now to a group of plays in which Shakespeare's genius is exhibited at the height of its powers. Perhaps such a rapid succession of masterpieces has never been witnessed as in the period which saw the production of *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, the two Parts of *King Henry IV.* and *King Henry V.* Whatever is crude and tentative in the poet's earlier performances disappears in these plays. The action seems of itself to reveal the depth of the philosophy, and the philosophy to illuminate the large extent of the action. The characters, no longer introduced for the mere amusement of the spectators, are all seen to be necessary for the evolution of the play. The comic dialogue, not less profusely witty than in *Love's Labour's Lost*, springs more spontaneously out of the occasion. In a word, Poetry here achieves her greatest triumph, by transporting us out of ourselves into a world at once ideal and natural in the highest degree.

The secret of this perfection is that Shakespeare had by this time discovered the true foundation of all great dramatic art. As his knowledge of life and his theatrical experience advanced together, he perceived that he must ground his creations in the sympathies and emotions of his audience. Abandoning the more or less abstract principle of composition, which he had adopted while he was under the

influence of Marlowe and Lyly, he instinctively struck into the path followed by the great Attic dramatists, and chose his subjects either from history or from those floating legends and romances which generations of story-tellers had made familiar to the minds of the people. Reflection and practice had shown him the truth of the principle which Aristotle extracts from the plays of the Greek tragedians, that "what has not happened we do not at once feel sure to be possible; but what has happened is manifestly possible, otherwise it would not have happened."[1] Having first successfully applied this principle to the epic materials of history in his dramatic rendering of the chronicles of Holinshed, he extended it to the sphere of legend, and in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet* dramatised epic situations already dealt with by *trouvères* and novelists. An ever-growing popularity encouraged him in his practice, and he henceforth grounded the fable of every play that he produced on some existing tale or history, with a well-defined beginning, middle, and end But with the main plot, which thus brought him into immediate sympathy with the spectators, he now combined characters and underplots, conveying, in a dramatic form, his own philosophic view of the action, and distributing light and shadow over the entire composition. The general effect produced by this method of workmanship, when contrasted with the more regular form of the Greek drama, determined by the central position of the chorus, is appropriately described by the word "Romantic."

Nowhere is the romantic mode of dramatic composition more brilliantly illustrated than in the great series of histories beginning with *King Richard II.* and ending with *King Henry V.* The unity of conception running through the series is as unmistakable as in *King Henry VI.* and *King Richard III.*; but whereas, in the earlier tetralogy, Shakespeare was chiefly concerned to display the general course of divine justice in human affairs, in the latter he represents rather the effects produced by the character and

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap. ix. pp. 5, 6.

conduct of individuals in their mutual relations with each other. Thus the dethronement of Richard II. never ceases to affect the fortunes of Henry IV.; and the character of Henry V., which reaches its heroic maturity after he has ascended the throne, is seen to be developing itself in his riotous life while still Prince of Wales.[1] From the sympathy and philosophic insight with which Shakespeare treats the character of this king, it is not unreasonable to suppose that his poetic conception was grounded on his own spiritual experience; so that, in the series of dramas of which Henry is the hero, we have not only a vivid representation of English history but a reflection of the poet's most intimate thoughts about life and morality.

King Richard II. was produced not later than 1597, in the August of which year the tragedy was entered in the Register of the Stationers' Company, and was published in a quarto form. This edition does not contain the "Parliament Scene and the Deposing of King Richard," which is first found in the quarto of 1608, a date at which the inserted episodes had ceased to have any sinister political meaning. In the course of the action Shakespeare faithfully follows Holinshed; but, in his moral treatment of the character of the King, as contrasted with the comparatively melodramatic representation of Richard III., it is evident that he has entered upon a new epoch of dramatic conception. Richard II. is not wanting in certain attributes of *virtù*, which are shown by his energetic conduct in banishing Bolingbroke and Mowbray. But, though ambitious to play the part of an absolute monarch, he has not sufficient greatness of mind to conceive what is required of him in that capacity. He has no sense of patriotism. Gaunt's indignant outburst against his vulgar policy of farming out the realm of England reflects the general sense of the weakness of his character;[2] he himself, unlike Bolingbroke, neglects to cultivate the necessary arts of popularity;[3] he thinks that he can be unjust and arbitrary

[1] His character is first referred to in *King Richard II.* Act v. Sc. 3.
[2] Act ii. Sc. 1, 31-68 (Globe edition).
[3] Act i. Sc. 4, 20-36.

with impunity.[1] Relying entirely on the strength of his external position, and being unsustained by any inward force of character, he collapses disgracefully, when the moment of trial comes, and passes from irrational confidence in his royal authority into equally childish despondency.[2] The bold spirit of the Bishop of Carlisle rouses him for a moment by pointing out to him the necessity of energy and resolution :—

> My lord, wise men ne'er sit and wail their woes,
> But presently prevent the ways to wail.
> To fear the foe, since fear oppresseth strength,
> Gives in your weakness strength unto your foe,
> And so your follies fight against yourself.
> Fear, and be slain; no worse can come to fight:
> And fight and die is death destroying death;
> When fearing dying pays death servile breath.[3]

But on receiving tidings of fresh calamity from Scroop Richard again despairs :—

> Thou hast said enough.
> Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth
> Of that sweet way I was in to despair!
> What say you now? What comfort have we now?
> By heaven, I'll hate him everlastingly
> That bids me be of comfort any more.
> Go to Flint castle: there I'll pine away;
> A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey.[4]

And so he does. In spite of flashes of kingly spirit and eloquence his actions are all unmanly, so that even his queen is astonished at his pusillanimity :—

> What! is my Richard both in shape and mind
> Transformed and weakened? Hath Bolingbroke deposed
> Thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart?
> The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw
> And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage
> To be o'erpowered; and wilt thou, pupil-like,
> Take thy correction mildly, kiss the rod,
> And fawn on rage with base humility,
> Which art a lion and a king of beasts?[5]

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[1] *Richard II.* Act ii. Sc. 1, 153-214.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2, 144-177.
[3] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2.
[4] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2.
[5] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 1.

Richard recognises the power of resolution, and says to Bolingbroke:—

> Well you deserve: they well deserve to have
> That know the strong'st and surest way to get.[1]

Conscious that he himself had been unable to keep what he once had, he is not man enough even to fall with dignity. The same incapacity to understand the reality of things that he had shown as King appears in him as a prisoner; he quibbles with words, and makes his own calamities the subject of a tearful and self-conscious philosophy. His abdication is a spectacle of misfortune and weakness which moves at once compassion and contempt.

Bolingbroke affords a striking contrast to his cousin. Crafty, self-contained, and resolute, though not wanting in humane feelings, he knows how to turn all circumstances to his own advantage, and his dying speech to his heir exhibits him as a profound exponent of Machiavellism:—

> Come hither, Harry, sit thou by my bed;
> And hear, I think, the very latest counsel
> That ever I shall breathe. God knows, my son,
> By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
> I met this crown; and I myself know well
> How troublesome it sat upon my head.
> To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
> Better opinion, better confirmation;
> For all the soil of the achievement goes
> With me into the earth. It seemed in me
> But as an honour snatched with boisterous hand,
> And I had many living to upbraid
> My gain of it by their assistances;
> Which daily grew to quarrel and to bloodshed,
> Wounding supposed peace: all these bold fears
> Thou see'st with peril I have answered;
> For all my reign hath been but as a scene
> Acting that argument: and now my death
> Changes the mode; for what in me was purchased,
> Falls upon thee in a more fairer sort;
> So thou the garland wear'st successively.
> Yet, though thou stand'st more sure than I could do,

[1] *Richard II.* Act iii. Sc. 3.

> Thou art not firm enough, since griefs are green;
> And all my friends, which thou must make thy friends,
> Have but their stings and teeth newly ta'en out;
> By whose fell working I was first advanced,
> And by whose power I well might lodge a fear
> To be again displaced: which to avoid,
> I cut them off; and had a purpose now
> To lead out many to the Holy Land,
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> With foreign quarrels; that action, hence borne out,
> May waste the memory of the former days.[1]

Between the strong but lowly-aiming character of Henry IV. and the imaginative weakness of Richard II. stands the remarkable figure of Henry V. This prince is represented from the first as being moved by a double personality. When his father is reproving him for his excesses, he points out the similarity between his son's disposition and Richard's:—

> For all the world
> As thou art to this hour was Richard then,
> When I from France set foot at Ravenspurgh,
> And even as I was then is Percy now.[2]

And this view of the Prince of Wales before he came to the throne is strongly borne out by the evidence of all the old historians. So too the conqueror of Agincourt had been already represented on the stage in an old play called *The Famous Victories of Henry V.*, where the riotous conduct of the Prince and his companions was set forth in such a manner as to give an opportunity to Tarlton, the favourite buffoon actor of the period, who played in it the part of the clown Derrick. As Tarlton died in 1588, it is probable that *The Famous Victories* (which was very popular) had been produced before Shakespeare's arrival in London: in any case, the play—a poor production written in prose—shows no trace of his hand, though it furnished him with one or two hints which he turned to good account

[1] *Henry IV.* Part 2, Act iv. Sc. 5.
[2] *Ibid.* Part 1, Act iii. Sc. 2

in *King Henry IV.* and *King Henry V.*[1] For the external facts and ground-work of his history he relied on Holinshed, but the strong vitality of the Prince of Wales's character he drew entirely from his imagination, and from his philosophic insight into his own and human nature.[2] On the one side the Prince is impelled to excess, both by his own temperament and by the delight he finds in observing the humours of the life about him: he is ironically amused, alike by the rich absurdity of Falstaff and by the fussy distractions of a "puny drawer." "I am of all humours," he says, "that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight."[3] Nevertheless he surveys all the shows of life from a post of observation:—

> I know you all, and will awhile uphold
> The unyoked humour of your idleness:
> Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That, when he please again to be himself,
> Being wanted, he may be more wondered at,
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.[4]

The King mistakes his character:—

> Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
> Which art my near'st and dearest enemy?
> Thou that art like enough, through vassal fear,
> Base inclination and the start of spleen,
> To fight against me under Percy's pay,
> To dog his heels and curtsy at his frowns,
> To show how much thou art degenerate.

[1] He obtained from it the idea of the mock conversation between the Prince and his father impersonated by Falstaff, which was suggested by the imitation in *The Famous Victories* by Derrick and John Cobler of the scene between the Prince and the Chief Justice; he also found in it the outline of Henry's courtship of Katherine of France.

[2] The writer of *The Famous Victories* represents the change in the character of Henry V. as having been caused by his repentance at his father's deathbed: Holinshed in his chronicle (A.D. 1412) is inclined to minimise the tradition of Henry's youthful excesses.

[3] *King Henry IV.* Part 1, Act. ii. Sc. 4.

[4] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 2.

To which the Prince replies:—

> Do not think so; you shall not find it so:
> And God forgive them that have so much swayed
> Your majesty's good thoughts away from me!

With how much sympathy this was written we may infer from Shakespeare's Sonnet cxxi.:—

> 'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
> When not to be receives reproach of being,
> And the just pleasure lost which is so deemed
> Not by our feeling but by others' seeing:
> For why should others' false adulterate eyes
> Give salutation to my sportive blood?
> Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
> Which in their wills count bad what I think good?
> No, I am that I am, and they that level
> At my abuses reckon up their own:
> I may be straight, though they themselves be bevel;
> By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be shown;
> Unless this general evil they maintain,
> All men are bad, and by their badness reign[2]

The philosophic, ironic side of Henry's nature, which attracts him to the company of Falstaff, is strongly expressed in the half-humorous emotion with which he surveys the supposed dead body of the fat knight on the field of Shrewsbury:—

> What, old acquaintance! could not all this flesh
> Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
> I could have better spared a better man:
> O, I should have a heavy miss of thee,
> *If I were much in love with vanity!*[3]

A manly energy and sense of reality in Henry prevents him from falling into such irresolution as destroyed Hamlet through over-reflection. On the other hand, he is raised above the impetuous Hotspur by the power of philosophic thought; both qualities combined render him the spiritual antithesis of Falstaff. A higher achievement of genius was never accomplished than the association of these three

[1] *Henry IV.* Part 1, Act III. Sc. 2.
[2] Sonnet cxxi
[3] *Henry IV.* Part 1, Act. v Sc. 4.

contrasted characters in a single play; and the profound representation in their persons of the principle of honour makes the *First Part of King Henry IV.* the most perfect expression at once of Shakespeare's own philosophy of life and of the ideals which, in the reign of Elizabeth, were urging their conflicting claims on the English imagination.

Hotspur is the incarnation of chivalry. He is, as Douglas calls him, "the King of honour."[1] Honour, the dazzling image of romantic valour and adventure, is the motive of all his actions. As his father says of him:—

> Imagination of some great exploit
> Drives him beyond the bounds of patience;[2]

and as he himself continues, half rapt in soliloquy:—

> By heaven methinks it were an easy leap,
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks;
> So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
> Without corrival all her dignities.[3]

But like the expiring chivalry of the age, his imagination is as remote from the realities of things as are the dreams embodied in Sidney's *Arcadia*. His uncle Worcester observes of him:—

> He apprehends a world of figures here,
> But not the form of what he should attend.[4]

Except in battle he is not a fitting companion for men of action. By his petulant impatience he offends those whom it is his interest to conciliate, and his ungoverned imagination makes him spoil the best laid plans.

Falstaff is violently contrasted with Hotspur. This character is the unmistakable child of Shakespeare's invention, who first represented him on the stage under the name of Sir John Oldcastle, as appears from several allusions in *Henry IV.*, and also from a passage in the play of a contemporary dramatist.[5] The same knight figures among

[1] *King Henry IV.* Part 1, Act iv. Sc. 4.
[2] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 3.
[3] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 3.
[4] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 3.
[5] Nathaniel Field in his *Amends of Ladies*, Act iv. Sc. 3 (1611), speaks of the soliloquy on honour as having been spoken by Sir John *Oldcastle*.

the companions of the Prince of Wales in *The Famous Victories of Henry V.*, but has there none of the attributes of Falstaff. The name of the latter seems to have been substituted for that of the historical Lollard, in consequence of the protests of the living descendants of Oldcastle, backed no doubt by the Puritan faction, who were displeased at seeing any one bearing the name of the martyr presented on the stage in a ridiculous light. The famous soliloquy on Honour contains the kernel of Falstaff's philosophy :—

> FAL. I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well
> PRINCE. Why, thou owest God a death [*Exit.*]
> FAL. 'Tis not due yet; I would be loath to pay him before his day What need I be so forward with him that calls not on me? Well, 'tis no matter; honour pricks me on. Yea, but how if honour prick me off when I come on? how then? Can honour set to a leg? no: or an arm? no: or take away the grief of a wound? no Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? no. What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? he that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? no. Doth he hear it? no. 'Tis insensible, then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? no. Why? detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism [1]

Here is the positive and material view of life put forward in all its grossness, but with extraordinary wit. Falstaff is the spokesman of all who are content "propter vitam vivendi perdere causas." In this respect he stands in the sharpest contrast with Hotspur, who exclaims with his dying breath .—

> I better brook the loss of brittle life
> Than those proud titles thou hast won of me,
> They wound my thoughts worse than thy sword my flesh:
> But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool;
> And time, that takes survey of all the world,
> Must have a stop [2]

Life, on the other hand, is everything to Falstaff :—

[1] *King Henry IV*, Part I. Act v Sc. I. [2] *Ibid.* Ac

I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath: give me life: which if I can save, so; if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there's an end.[1]

If it be asked what there is in Falstaff—a knight without sense of honour, a boastful coward, a fat debauchee—to attract the heroic soul of Prince Henry, the answer is that Falstaff is a comic character appealing with peculiar sympathy to that reflective humour which the Prince possessed. His character is an illustration of the truth of Plato's subtle observation that "the sense of the ridiculous is mainly excited by exhibitions of self-deception."[2] He is a genuine representative of the selfish side of human nature, and puts into forcible words thoughts and feelings which other men do their best to keep out of sight. His cowardice is absolutely transparent, yet he is content with himself, and the witty euphuistic logic, the theatrical bombast, the enormous lies, under which he seeks to disguise his real nature, only serve to bring it into stronger relief. Hence his character produces, in the imagination of the spectator, not only an idea of incongruity—the most essential element of the ridiculous—but that sense of superiority so forcibly described by Hobbes: "The passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory, arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison of the infirmity of others, or of our own formerly."[3]

For Prince Henry, conscious of real superiority, and at the same time deeply impressed with the sense of "vanity," such a character naturally provides an endless fund of entertainment, so long as he chooses to indulge his merely contemplative tendencies. But when the moment for action comes, the Prince shows that he realises in the highest degree the true requirements of honour:—

> And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
> That this same child of honour and renown,
> This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
> And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.

[1] *King Henry IV.* Part i. Act v. Sc. 3.

[2] Plato, *Philebus*, 48.

[3] Cited by Butcher in his *Aristotle's Theory of Fine Art* (2nd edition), p. 365.

For every honour sitting on his helm
Would they were multitudes, and on my head
My shames redoubled! for the time will come,
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.
Percy is but my factor, good my lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account,
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time,
Or I will tear the reckoning from his heart.[1]

Through this double personality the drama unfolds, in the most convincing manner, the meaning of that apparently sudden conversion of the Prince of Wales on his accession to the throne, which, as related by the chroniclers, appears an insoluble mystery. The playwright who wrote *The Famous Victories of Henry V.* made no attempt to solve the problem, but placed the historic fact baldly before the spectator. When we compare the crude representation of character in this play (which it is to be remembered was a great favourite with the audiences of the day) with the parting speech of Shakespeare's Henry V. to Falstaff, we perceive how erroneous is the opinion of Grant White, who would depict Shakespeare as a professional playwright, merely concerned to amuse his audience:—

I know thee not, old man: fall to thy prayers,
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamed of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old and so profane,
But, being awaked, I do despise my dream.
Make less thy body hence, and more thy grace.
Leave gormandising; know the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men.
Reply not to me with a full-born jest.
Presume not that I am the thing I was;
For God doth know, so shall the world perceive
That I have turned away my former self;
So will I those that kept me company.[2]

Nevertheless, the sense of vanity, which was the mainspring of the Prince of Wales's conduct before he assumed responsibility, is strong in him after he has become king.

[1] *King Henry IV.* Part i. Act iii. Sc. 2. [2] *Ibid.* Part ii. Act v. Sc. 4.

From his old association he has learned how common men think about common things, so that he can reason with soldiers like Williams and Bates sympathetically and on their own level; but the rough homeliness of their reflection oppresses him with the irony of his position, and when he is alone, he breaks into a soliloquy that Hamlet might have uttered on the real nature of the external "Onore," which the world in general values above everything:—

> O ceremony, show me but thy worth!
> What is thy soul of adoration?
> Art thou aught else but place, degree and form,
> Creating awe and fear in other men?
> Wherein thou art less happy being feared
> Than they in fearing.
> What drinkest thou oft, instead of homage sweet,
> But poisoned flattery? O, be sick, great greatness,
> And bid thy ceremony give thee cure!
> Thinkest thou the fiery fever will go out
> With titles blown from adulation?
> Will it give place to flexure and low bending?
> Canst thou, when thou command'st the beggar's knee,
> Command the health of it? etc., etc.[1]

On the field of Agincourt, as at Shrewsbury, however, all sense of irony disappears; the King combines the resolution of the Bastard in *King John* with the fiery imagination of Hotspur:—

> WESTMORELAND. O that we now had here
> But one ten thousand of those men in England
> That do no work to-day!
> K. HENRY. What's he that wishes so?
> My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin:
> If we are mark'd to die, we are enow
> To do our country loss; and if to live,
> The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
> God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
> By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
> It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
> Such outward things dwell not in my desires:
> But if it be a sin to covet honour,
> I am the most offending soul alive.[2]

[1] *King Henry V.* Act iv. Sc. 1.

[2] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 3.

Such was the genius with which Shakespeare converted a series of famous events in English history into a vehicle for representing the deepest and most universal truths of human character. Not less admirable is the dramatic skill shown in the accommodation of the subject to the forms of the stage, by the use made of the underplot in displaying the character of the leading personages. Where the comic interludes in Shakespeare's earlier plays, such as the *Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, are too often introduced, in Lyly's fashion, for the mere exhibition of wit, the scenes at Rochester and Gadshill, at the Boar's Head and at Shallow's House, are, in *Henry IV.*, all intimately connected with the main action, and are necessary for the evolution of the characters of Falstaff and the Prince. Lastly, the euphuistic smartness of dialogue, cultivated in such plays as *Love's Labour's Lost*, is now seen to be toned down into a natural style, suited to the character of the speakers, and forming an appropriate vehicle for some of the most genuinely comic scenes in the English language. Throughout *Henry IV.* the euphuism of Falstaff's language—a good sample of which occurs in the inimitable mock trial at the Boar's Head—is unmistakable, but it is as far removed from the mechanical rhetoric of Lyly as Falstaff himself from Euphues:—

Peace, good pint-pot, peace, good tickle-brain Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted the sooner it wears That thou art my son, I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly the villanous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me If then thou be son to me, here lies the point; why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher and eat blackberries? a question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief and take purses? a question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile, so doth the company thou keepest · for, Harry, now do I speak to thee not in drink but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion, not in

words only, but in woes also: and yet there is a virtuous man in thy company, and I know not his name.[1]

I have dwelt at length on this great succession of historic dramas, because it is in them that we can trace most clearly the advance of Shakespeare, both in philosophic thought and dramatic skill. They furnish us with the key of personal sympathy needed to unlock the full significance of such plays as *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *Measure for Measure*, in which, though the conception and execution are not less plainly the product of the dramatist's own emotional experience, his sympathies are more closely veiled behind the characters of fictitious persons. Perhaps the most completely dramatic of all his plays, certainly the one in which his constructive skill is most evident, is *The Merchant of Venice*. This comedy, one of those mentioned by Meres, was produced some time before 1598, at what exact date we have no evidence to show. By some it is supposed to be identical with the "Venecyon Comedy," mentioned by Henslowe in his diary as early as 1594,[2] but, in my opinion, the finish of the style, and the complex art of the whole composition, clearly prove it to be a later work than the *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, which can hardly have been written before 1595. Shakespeare's creative power in organising scattered materials is here seen in its most splendid form. The action of the play is grounded on no less than three different stories, and though, from a casual expression of Stephen Gosson's it has been inferred that Shakespeare was indebted for his plot to an older drama, this reasoning seems to me in the highest degree improbable.[3] Many particulars of the central episode—namely, that of the agreement for the pound of flesh—are taken from an old *fabliau* which, after appearing in the *Gesta Romanorum*, had been reproduced towards the close of the fourteenth century in a more polished form, in the *Il Pecorone* of Giovanni Fiorentino,

[1] *Henry IV.* Part i. Act ii. Sc. 4.
[2] Henslowe, *Diary*, p. 40.
[3] Steevens' Shakespeare (1803), vol. vii. p. 229.

an imitator of Boccaccio.[1] With this tale Shakespeare combined the story—also taken from the *Gesta Romanorum* —of the daughter of the Soldan of Syria, whose wise choice between three caskets procured her the honour of marriage with the son of the Emperor of Rome.[2] Finally, the episode of Jessica's elopement is taken from Massuccio di Salerno, a novelist of the fifteenth century, who gives a comic account of the distracted emotions of an old usurer, on learning that his daughter had left his house under the same circumstances as the Jewess, carrying off his gold and jewels[3]

These various incidents are not brought together at random, but with a view to the necessities of the drama. *Il Pecorone*, in its epic form, was quite unsuited to the stage. The character of Antonio, the unselfish friend, is indeed to be found in it, but the hero of the story is a gull, and the heroine—at least when she first appears—an adventuress, whose only virtue is the crafty cunning in which the women of the oriental story-teller are always made to excel. When Shakespeare had conceived the two sympathetic characters of Portia and Bassanio, it became necessary for him to modify the framework of Fiorentino's story, and he did so with consummate art, by fusing with it the story of the caskets. Again, there is nothing whatever in the *fabliau* out of which grew the story about the pound of flesh to suggest the vivid character of Shylock. The interest of the tale, as handled by the *trouvères*, consists partly in the illustration of the wickedness of usury, partly in the casuistry of the situation produced by the conflicting claims of human and divine law: the anonymous Jew merely figures in it because his people were regarded as the natural representatives of usury. But in the dramatic conception of Shakespeare, the situation expands into an image of the complex struggle of life, and in this the nationality of Shylock becomes of importance. Nowhere is the wide grasp of Shakespeare's in-

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i, vol i, p 319
[2] *Ibid* p 361.
[3] Dunlop, *History of Fiction* (2nd edition), vol ii, p 393.

tellect, or the fine balance of his judgment, more characteristically shown than in his conduct of the action in *The Merchant of Venice.* The moral interest is distributed between the relations of Antonio to Shylock, on the one hand, and the opposite pleadings of Shylock and Portia on the other. Antonio is not free from blame; Shylock has just grounds of grievance against him on the score of humanity. The merchant has called the usurer

> Misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
> And spat upon his Jewish gaberdine.[1]

This is against reason, and Shylock urges justly:—

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard with me but I will better the instruction.[2]

Here we see that Shylock has certain attributes of Marlowe's Barabas. In the last words cited above he uses the argument suggested by Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* to his daughter, Abigail,[3] and indeed, in Shylock's steady and relentless purpose, Shakespeare seems to have taken several hints from Marlowe's character, just as, in the argument between Shylock and the Duke, he has evidently studied with care the several pleas put forward in the "Declamation" on the subject in the *Orator* of Silvayn.[4] It is only when Shylock has fully proved, by his own actions, that his purpose is diabolical; when he has rejected, without hesitation, first Portia's general appeal to his compassion, then the offer of repayment twice over, at last even the entreaty to pro-

[1] *Merchant of Venice*, Act i. Sc. 3.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 1. [3] *The Jew of Malta*, Act i. Sc. 1.
[4] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. i. p. 355.

vide a surgeon, that Portia pronounces the full doom against him, logically incurred by his own inhumanity:—

> For as thou urgest justice, be assured,
> Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.[1]

In order to remove all grounds of sympathy with Shylock, it was necessary to lower his character from the height at which it might have appeared to stand, if he had been represented as animated solely by the purpose of revenge. With this view Shakespeare's unfailing tact wrought into the action the episode of Jessica's elopement, which shows the Jew in a light at once mean and ridiculous. Salanio describes his behaviour:—

> I never heard a passion so confused,
> So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
> As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
> "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
> Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
> Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!"[2]

Opposed to Shylock, the charming person of Portia, frank and womanly, modest and intellectual, is beautifully commended to our sympathy by the preliminary episode of the caskets; and besides the effect of chiaroscuro produced by the two underplots on the whole composition, the somewhat displeasing character of Jessica is softened by the delightful moonlight conversation between her and Lorenzo in the garden scene at Belmont. As to the dialogue, the speech of Shylock, cited before, shows how much Shakespeare had learned from Lyly; but, as has been observed of the wit of Falstaff, the antithetical manner of the elder dramatist is now employed, not for its own sake, but as a mirror of emotion and character. Almost the only trace of the earlier euphuistic style is the episode of Launcelot Gobbo, which is in no way necessary to the action, and (being an obvious revival of the character of Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) is simply introduced to entertain the audience.

Much Ado About Nothing resembles *The Merchant of*

[1] *Merchant of Venice*, Act iv. Sc. 1 [2] *Ibid.* Act ii Sc. 8

Venice in the elaborate structure of its plot: the action of the play never stands still, and the *dénouement*, though not altogether probable, is worked out with more care than Shakespeare is accustomed to bestow on this portion of his dramas. The comedy was produced before August 21, 1600, under which date it appears in the Register of the Stationers' Company; and as it is not among the plays mentioned by Meres, we may perhaps assume it to have been written in 1599. Shakespeare has taken as the groundwork the tale of Timbreo di Cardona, as related by Bandello, which the poet had probably read either in the original or in Belleforest's translation.[1] There are signs also that he had read (perhaps in Harington's translation of the *Orlando Furioso*) Ariosto's version of the same story embodied in the episode of the Ariodante and Ginevra.[2] With the main plot are structurally connected the underplots, exhibiting the loves of Benedick and Beatrice and the blunders of Dogberry and Verges; and, for our historical purpose, the interest of the play lies in its relation to *Love's Labour's Lost*, in which the comic motives of these underplots may be seen in embryo. Thus the character of Biron is, in many respects, a rough sketch of that of Benedick, while Rosaline is a still more shadowy outline of Beatrice; but in the earlier comedy there is no sign of the dramatic skill or subtle knowledge of character shown in the conspiracy, whereby, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the male and female misogamist, through the flattery of self-love, are "brought into a mountain of affection the one with the other." So too Constable Dull, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, fully anticipates in his confusions of language and logic the inimitable self-satisfaction of Dogberry; but Shakespeare was then far from having arrived at that conception of dramatic irony which inspired him with the happy idea of making the blundering watchmen the chief agents in the detection of Don John's villainous plot. Nor had he yet invented the form in which to associate tragedy and comedy, so that neither the more serious side of Beatrice's

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iii. p. 104. [2] *Orlando Furioso*, Canto v.

character, shown in her devotion to her slandered cousin, nor Benedick's, proved by the challenge to his friend Claudio, could have been represented on the stage. The brilliant combats of repartee between Benedick and Beatrice are plainly euphuistic, but the euphuism is in keeping with the characters; nothing, for example, can be more natural and appropriate than Benedick's reflections on the power of love:—

> May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not: I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool.

In *Much Ado about Nothing* plot and action predominate over reflection; the contrary is the case in *As You Like It*, which is the most purely contemplative of all Shakespeare's comedies. Registered by the Stationers' Company in August 1600, it must have been the work of the same period as the play we have just been considering, and the method of its construction is peculiarly interesting as offering perhaps the best example that exists of the evolution of a mediæval story from an epic into a dramatic shape. The original germ of the play is to be found in the *Tale of Gamelyn*, which was for some time supposed to be the work of Chaucer, but is really a metrical *fabliau* illustrating the process described in the first volume of this history, whereby "gests" and romances were degraded to suit the popular taste.[1] This ballad, of the fourteenth century—relating in verse of little merit how Gamelyn, the youngest son of Sir Johan of Burdis, was defrauded of his rights by his elder brother, and how he joined a troop of outlaws and conducted himself after the manner of Robin Hood—was doubtless founded on some still older prose romance, and came into the hands of Thomas Lodge, who, during his voyage with Captain Cavendish to the Straits of Magellan, amused himself with metamorphosing it into a court romance, modelled partly on *Euphues* and partly on the *Arcadia*.[2] Keeping closely to the original

[1] Vol. i. pp. 445-468 [2] See vol. ii. p. 322.

story of Sir John of Bordeaux' sons, Lodge added to it the figures of the usurping and the banished Kings of France; of Rosalynd and her cousin Alinda; of Montanus and the scornful shepherdess Phœbe; and softened the portion of the narrative relating to the outlaws into episodes connected with the Arcadian life of the exiled king. His main motive was to present, in the dialect of *Euphues*, a picture of ideal pastoralism, diversified with scenes of romantic love, and rendered interesting by such mistakes about sex as Sidney had introduced into his *Arcadia*. Thus modified, the story was well adapted to exhibit those tragi-comic contrasts in life which were congenial to the imagination of Shakespeare. The poet found, in the fortunes of Orlando, Rosalind and the Duke her father, an action of misfortune bravely and cheerfully endured; in the Forest of Arden a scene of natural beauty, where the action might be appropriately laid; confusions in the love-plot, such as he had already represented in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; and that philosophic antithesis between the life of the Court and the life of the country which, as we have seen, was always present in the mind of Sidney.

But though Shakespeare thus had all the materials for creation at his disposal, the materials were wanting in the spirit of life. Lodge had no feeling for action and character. When he departed from the narrative of the ballad he generally altered for the worse. He never thought of discriminating between the disposition of the two brothers. Saladyne (Shakespeare's Oliver) was to him only a person useful for pairing off with Alinda (Celia) and for making long rhetorical speeches, which in no way differ in character from those of Rosader (Orlando): the entire story in his hands is nothing but an exercise in euphuism. The first thing Shakespeare did was to condense the incidents of the tale in such a way as to create an immediate sympathy with the patient, brave, unselfish, and chivalrous Orlando, and so to preserve the interest of the spectators in his fortunes, even when the action seemed to stand still in the Forest of Arden. Next he had to vivify the landscape

itself, which, in the *Golden Legacy*, is completely ideal and conventional, as may be inferred from the following passage:—

The ground where they sate was diapred with Flora's riches, as if she ment to wrap Tellus in the glorie of her vestments: round about in the form of an amphitheater were most curiously planted pine trees, interseamed with lymons and cytrons, which with the thickness of their boughs so shadowed the place that Phœbus could not prie into the secret of that arbour.[1]

In *As You Like It*, on the other hand, the painting is picturesque and particular, and at the same time in harmony with the Arcadian idealism of the whole play. We see the

> Oak whose antique root peeps out
> Upon the brook that brawls along this wood:[2]

the Duke's company, who

> Under the shade of *melancholy* boughs,
> Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.[3]

Rosalind's "sheepcote fenced about with olive trees," and the path leading to it:—

> West of this place, down in the neighbour bottom:
> The rank of osiers by the murmuring stream
> Left on your right hand brings you to the place.[4]

The delightful retirement in the Forest is peopled with a great variety of personages, all of whom Shakespeare took care to connect with the main action by means of separate underplots, and in such a manner as to represent the different moods aroused by the idea of the romantic Arcadia. Pastoralism had already touched the fancy of Elizabeth's age in many characteristic compositions. Spenser in *The Shepherds' Calendar* had moralised on the transitoriness of life; Barnfield in his *Passionate Shepherd* had painted beautiful landscapes; Sidney in his verses "In Dispraise of the Court" had lyrically expressed

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. ii. p. 44.
[2] *As You Like It*, Act ii. Sc. 1.
[3] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 7
[4] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 3.

But he has one advantage, which Jaques envies him, the license of free speech, granted to his supposed folly. When Jaques proposes to wear nothing but motley he stipulates :—

> I must have liberty
> Withal, as large a charter as the wind,
> To blow on whom I please; for so fools have;
> And they that are most galled with my folly,
> They most must laugh. And why, sir, must they so?
> The "why" is plain as way to parish church:
> He that a fool doth very wisely hit
> Doth very foolishly, although he smart,
> Not to seem senseless of the bob: if not,
> The wise man's folly is anatomised
> Even by the squandering glances of the fool.
> Invest me in my motley; give me leave
> To speak my mind, and I will through and through
> Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
> If they will patiently receive my medicine.[1]

As his name seems to imply, the fool acts as the touchstone to every kind of human folly. Without being able to generalise, as Jaques does, his particular observation gives him perhaps an even stronger apprehension of the deepest truths of things :—

> He drew a dial from his poke,
> And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
> Says very wisely, "It is ten o'clock:
> Thus we may see," *quoth* he, "how the world wags:
> 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
> And after one hour more 'twill be eleven;
> And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
> And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot,
> And thereby hangs a tale."[2]

Touchstone is distinguished by a kind of materialistic common sense, which enables him to seize on the reality of each situation in which he finds himself, and stoically to acquiesce in facts. When, for example, with the same fidelity that ennobles Lear's fool, he is accompanying Rosalind and Celia in their flight, he makes no attempt to encourage them in their distress :—

[1] *As You Like It*, Act ii. Sc. 7.

[2] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 7.

Ros. O Jupiter, how weary are my spirits!
Touch. I care not for my spirits, if my legs were not weary.

. . . . . .

Cel. I pray you, bear with me; I cannot go no further.
Touch. For my part, I had rather bear with you than bear you; yet I should bear no cross if I did bear you, for I think you have no money in your purse.
Ros. Well, this is the forest of Arden
Touch. Ay, now am I in Arden; the more fool I; when I was at home, I was in a better place: but travellers must be content.[1]

In the same vein is his philosophy of marriage:—

Jaq. Will you be married, motley?
Touch. As the ox hath his bow, sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires; and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling.[2]

He has been a courtier, and understands how the most high-flown disputes about honour may be ended by tricks of language. At the same time he is by no means inclined, like the sentimental courtiers, to contrast court and country to the advantage of the latter:—

Corin. And how like you this shepherd's life, Master Touchstone?
Touch. Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes much against my stomach.[3]

Shakespeare's dramatic skill and comic humour are illustrated with peculiar brilliancy in the use he makes of Touchstone to expose the absurdity of romantic pastoralism, by bringing the paradoxical fool into contact with such truly rustic characters as Corin, Audrey, and William.

The comedy called *Twelfth Night* is first mentioned

[1] *As you Like It*, Act ii. Sc. 4.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 3.
[3] *Ibid* Act iii. Sc. 2.

on the stage under an entry of the date February 2, 1601-2, in the diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple. It differs in character both from *Much Ado about Nothing* and *As You Like It*, having less action than the former and a more intricate plot than the latter. Historically its interest lies in its relation to the earlier *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Comedy of Errors*, one of which it resembles in the episode of the disguised female page, wooing on behalf of her master; and the other in the confusion produced by the likeness between twins. The main-plot is closely imitated from *Gl'Ingannati*, an Italian play which is thus described by Hunter :—

> Fabritio and Lelia, a brother and sister, are separated at the sack of Rome in 1527. Lelia is carried to Modena, where resides Flaminio, to whom she has formerly been attached. Lelia disguises herself as a boy, and enters his service. Flaminio had forgotten Lelia, and was suitor to Isabella, a Modenese lady. Lelia, in her male attire, is employed in embassies from Flaminio to Isabella. Isabella is insensible to the importunities of Flaminio, but conceives a violent passion for Lelia, mistaking her for a man. In the third act Fabritio arrives at Modena, when mistakes arise owing to the close resemblance between Fabritio and his sister in her male attire. Ultimately recognitions take place; the affections of Isabella are easily transferred from Lelia to Fabritio; and Flaminio takes to his bosom the affectionate and faithful Lelia.[1]

From this play Shakespeare seems to have also obtained the suggestion for Maria, Olivia's waiting-maid, whose original is called Pasquella; while from Cesare, one of the characters in *Gl'Inganni*, a somewhat similar play of earlier date, he took Viola's assumed name of Cesario. It will readily be recognised that the plot of *Twelfth Night*, as well as of its immediate originals, is derived from the story of Felismena in the *Diana Enamorada* of Montemayor, already reproduced in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; but, as I have observed, the character of the self-sacrificing Viola is an infinitely finer and more

[1] Hunter, *New Illustrations of Shakespeare*, vol. i. pp. 393-394.

elaborate conception than that of Julia in Shakespeare's older play.

The advance of the poet in imagination and art is still more clearly marked by the admirable underplot in *Twelfth Night.* In this the natural mistakes, caused by resemblance and disguise in the main action, are balanced by an exhibition of the errors produced by self-love, exemplified in the character of Malvolio. Malvolio is one of Shakespeare's finest and most subtle conceptions; his delusion is common to humanity, and it is characteristic of the poet that he should have represented the keen-witted Benedick, when his vanity has once been touched with the belief of Beatrice's love for him, reasoning precisely in the same way as the conceited steward.[1] That Shakespeare himself well understood the nature of the disease is plain from his lxii. Sonnet :—

> Sin of self love possesseth all mine eye
> And all my soul and all my every part;
> And for this sin there is no remedy,
> It is so grounded inward in my heart.
> Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
> No shape so true, no truth of such account;
> And for myself mine own worth do define,
> As I all other in all worths surmount.
> But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
> Beated and chopped with tanned antiquity,
> Mine own self love quite contrary I read,
> Self so self loving were iniquity.
> 'Tis thee, myself, that for myself I praise,
> Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

To have projected the experiences of self-love into an outward form, to have imagined Malvolio "in the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow," exposing his conceit to the hidden audience who had contrived the plot to draw it out, rehearsing his intended conduct to Sir Toby who was watching him, and at last making such an exhibition of his delusions to the unconscious Olivia as to possess her with an idea of his madness—this was

[1] Compare *Twelfth Night*, Act ii. Sc. 5, with *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act ii. Sc. 3—"*Bened.* 'Ha! "Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner." There's a double meaning in that,'" etc., etc.

to have reached a dramatic point beyond which the genius of the romantic comedy of character could not proceed. Scarcely less admirable is the inventive skill which has linked the underplot to the main plot, in such a manner as to produce a display of character in the challenge carried between Viola and Sir Andrew Aguecheek by the mischievous Sir Toby. When to these elements is added the poetical irony arising partly from the pathos of Viola's situation, partly from the sweet singing of the nonsense-speaking, crack-brained fool, it is a question whether, at least in respect of action and character, *Twelfth Night* should not take equal rank with *As You Like It* as the finest of Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

Quite distinct from it in spirit, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which was probably produced on the stage about 1600, has an interest of its own in view of the tradition that it owes its existence to the desire of Queen Elizabeth to see Falstaff represented in love, and also as being the only comedy of Shakespeare based throughout upon the direct imitation of contemporary manners. It was entered for publication in the Stationers' Register on January 18, 1601-2, but the text of the quarto, in which form it then appeared, was so much altered and expanded in the folio of 1623 as to suggest that Shakespeare carefully revised it in the interval. Like most of the other comedies of this period, the main incidents in the plot, as far as they are connected with Falstaff's love-making, are taken from Italian and other stories, the principal of which are two tales in *Le tredeci Piacevoli Notti* of Straparola;[1] but the scene, in which Falstaff is pinched by the Fairies and Anne Page is stolen, is Shakespeare's own invention. This incident shows a good deal of the spirit of Lyly; in other portions of the play Shakespeare seems to have been mainly animated by satirical motives. The bombastic theatrical style of Pistol is clearly intended to ridicule the early manner of Marlowe and Peele, which was now going out of fashion; while, in Nym's constant use of the word "humours," I think there must be a certain

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iii. pp. 1-80.

sarcastic reference to Ben Jonson's new comic style, just coming into vogue. If so, it was only the return of a compliment, for Ben Jonson had undoubtedly delivered a stroke at Shakespeare's romantic practice in the prologue to *Every Man in his Humour;* and we know from the *Return from Parnassus* that Shakespeare had retaliated, though in what manner the author does not say.[1] I confess that it seems to me folly to complain, as Malone's disciples do, of Ben Jonson, for attacking Shakespeare, or, as Gifford does, of Shakespeare, for joining in the assault on Ben Jonson. The quarrel, as far as there was one, was purely literary, Classicist against Romanticist: each school was working on principles which seemed to it worth defending: in the personal relations between Jonson and Shakespeare there was, as far as we can see, no trace of malignity. Shakespeare, at any rate, pleased Jonson with the sincere flattery of imitation, for the character of the jealous Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* owes some of its features to Kitely in *Every Man in his Humour;* nor is Slender without a family likeness to Master Matthew and Master Stephen in the same play. As for the other characters of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff, Shallow, Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph were old acquaintances of the audience; and the poet doubtless felt secure of the approval of the pit when imitating the broken English of Sir Hugh Evans and Dr. Caius, seeing that he had already made a similar experiment on the public taste in the persons of Fluellen and Katharine of France in *King Henry V.*

Whatever may have been the cause, certain it is that after *The Merry Wives of Windsor* the *vis comica* in Shakespeare's plays seems to dwindle. In the group of dramas standing apart from his pure tragedies and romantic tragi-comedies, the tragic principle largely predominates. *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Cymbeline, Pericles,* and *The Winter's Tale,* may be regarded as comedies, in so far as the misfortunes which they represent are happily surmounted in the end; on the other hand they are tragic, both as regards action

[1] *Return from Parnassus,* Act iv. Sc. 3.

and character, almost up to the close. They would seem to be the work of a mind attracted to the subject by finding something in the situation congenial to its own view of life, without being altogether in sympathy with the dramatic form imposed upon it, partly by the exigencies of the story, partly by the expectations of the audience. The comic passages in all of them are wanting in life and inspiration: the *dénouement* is improbable, abrupt, almost arbitrary, as though the poet, after interesting himself in the action up to a certain point, had left it to conclude itself at haphazard. Though *Measure for Measure* touches almost unprecedented depths of tragic emotion, and though both *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* contain episodes of the most beautiful and pathetic romance, these plays, as a group, leave the imagination with a sense of something wanting, and cannot therefore be counted among Shakespeare's happiest works. At the same time, they are of great historical interest, as throwing light on the gradual transition of his invention from comedy to tragedy.

All's Well that Ends Well first appears in the folio of 1623, but, as it appears to have suggested some of the incidents in *Measure for Measure*, we may reasonably suppose it to have been written before that play and after *Twelfth Night*, which it resembles in its treatment of the clown or fool. The main-plot is taken, in most of the details, from Boccaccio's story in the *Decameron* (translated by Painter in *The Palace of Pleasure*), which relates the artifices whereby Giletta of Narbona obtained the hand of the Count Beltramo, and, after being deserted by her husband, regained his company and affection;[1] the underplot, exhibiting the character of Parolles, and the scenes between the fool and the old countess, seem to be the inventions of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is not seen at his best in this play. It has a fatal blot in the detestable character of Bertram, who, after deserting his wife, feigning a hypocritical sorrow for her supposed death, lying to his king, and slandering the woman whom

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iii. p. 138.

he believes to have granted him her favours, is restored without a word of reproach to the arms of the amiable and devoted Helen. Parolles is one of the class of braggart and cowardly soldiers represented by Pistol and Bobadil. The scene of the drum, in which his real cowardice is exposed, is genuinely comic; but his character suffers by the comparison it suggests with the rich humour of Falstaff. So, too, the wit of the countess's fool seems forced and unnatural, when compared with that of Touchstone and Feste; we feel that the poet has introduced the character, as he introduced Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, merely to amuse the spectators.

Measure for Measure is, in part, a more mature conception of the same subject. If we may accept Collier's not improbable conjecture that a passage near the opening of this play alludes to the recent accession of James I.,[1] it would have been produced about 1604, a date that corresponds well with the style and the vein of thought which characterise it. In it Shakespeare is dealing with a subject peculiarly congenial to his imagination, namely, the perpetual conflict proceeding in the soul of man between desire and will, instinct and conscience, sensuality and honour, human law and divine compassion. A hundred varieties of the story represented in *Measure for Measure*, all in the hands of the mediæval *trouvère* illustrating a question of moral casuistry, presented themselves for his choice; but of these the two most distinct were the versions of Giraldi Cinthio in his *Hecatommithi*, and of George Whetstone in his *Heptameron of Civil Discourses*. In Cinthio's tale the conduct of Angelo is imputed to a nameless jurist, a governor under the Emperor Maximilian; the girl who is the original of Isabella actually sacrifices her honour at the solicitation of her brother; neither of these characters has a name; the brother is put to death by the jurist; the sentence of justice is pronounced by the Emperor on the appeal of the injured sister against the jurist, who is condemned to marry his

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victim in satisfaction of her honour, but to be executed next day for the murder of her brother. His life is spared at the intercession of his wife (who conceives that a new set of duties are imposed upon her by marriage), and the two live happily for ever after! Whetstone, while borrowing the story without acknowledgment, made it, in one or two points, more probable. He gave the name of Promos to the jurist; converted the latter into the Viceroy of Corvinus, King of Hungary; called the sister Cassandra and the brother Andrugio; and, instead of causing the latter to be killed in prison, represented him as escaping with his life. He thus got rid of the monstrous improbability that the sister should have lived contentedly as the wife of her brother's murderer; for, when Andrugio discovers himself to be alive, it becomes unnecessary to carry out the second part of the Emperor's sentence. Still the narrative, even when thus amended, was far enough from verisimilitude, and in Whetstone's hands it showed distinct traces of the mainly didactic purpose of story-telling, illustrated in the *Gesta Romanorum*.[1]

The manner in which Shakespeare handles these crude materials, in what Aristotle calls the "complication" (δέσις) of his plot, is a splendid example of dramatic skill and philosophic thought. By causing the Duke, after temporarily abdicating his authority, to disguise himself, he provided a *deus ex machinâ* for the solution of all the difficult moral situations. It is the Duke who eases the inevitably painful position of Isabella after she has refused to save her brother's life by the sacrifice of her honour; who arranges the substitution of Barnardine's head for Claudio's; and who finally exposes the guilt of Angelo, thus remedying the improbability of Whetstone's narrative, who makes Promos confess on the motion of his own conscience, after being accused by Cassandra. With equal brilliancy of imagination Shakespeare inspires the dull commonplace of Whetstone's story with life and poetry by his conception of the part of Isabella. In order to blacken the character of Promos, Whetstone had represented Cassandra yielding to

[1] For both stories see *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iii. pp. 155-184.

the solicitations of her brother, but Shakespeare, with a deep sense of the universal nature of the problem, makes Isabella the type of lofty and ideal purity. She thus becomes the moving principle in the two leading situations of the play, one exhibiting the struggle between the love of life and the dictates of honour in the mind of Claudio, the other the strife between love and will in the heart of Angelo.

Claudio's character, though slight, is a masterpiece. In him the principle of *virtù* is not highly developed. He is an average man, ready, in theory, to submit his will to the laws of honour and religion, but who, from the laxity of morals prevailing in the society about him, is feebly armed against the impulses of passion. Confronted with the extreme consequences brought upon him by the revival of an over-severe law and by his own conduct, he at first faces death with the stoical resolution of an ordinarily brave man; but when the prospect of escape opens before him, he begins to reason about honour to the same effect, though of course not in the same vein, as Falstaff. He has accepted the reasonable and abstract exhortations of the supposed friar, setting forth the vanity of life, with manly resignation; and when Isabella first informs him of the proposal of Angelo, conscience causes him to reject it in a spirit which inspires the admiration of Isabella, and her sublime words:—

> There spake my brother; there my father's grave
> Did utter forth a voice.[1]

But thinking upon life, the fear of death overwhelms him, and lights up his imagination with all the lurid horrors of the unseen, particularised in the famous lines beginning, "Ay, but to die, and go we know not where." By this he is driven to the natural but mean solicitation: "Sweet sister, let me live." Yet when the astonished indignation of Isabella recalls him to a sense of the truth, his better nature once more regains the mastery, and he prepares to meet his fate with calm resignation.

[1] *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

The character of Angelo, on the other hand, is a profound study of man's capacity for self-deception. He is distinguished for *virtù*. In pursuit of his own selfish aims and desires he shows himself resolute, relentless, and insensible to the claims of others, as when he deserts Mariana, to whom he is betrothed, after the loss of her dowry.[1] Yet, as his conduct has not injured him in the eyes of the world, he is not conscious of the baseness of his own nature, which the clear-sighted Duke is resolved to test by placing him in a position of authority. Imagining himself to be superior to the allurements of love, because he is not prone to the temptation to which Claudio has yielded, Angelo supposes himself to be a saint, and regards himself as the incarnate will that executes the decree of the moral law:—

> ISABEL. Must he needs die?
> ANGELO. Maiden, no remedy.
> ISAB. Yes; I do think that you might pardon him,
> And neither heaven nor man grieve at the mercy.
> ANG. I will not do't.
> ISAB. But can you, if you would?
> ANG. Look, what I will not, that I cannot do.[2]

Isabella herself afterwards recognises that he was sincere in his desire for the public improvement:—

> I partly think
> A due sincerity governed his deeds,
> Till he did look on me.[3]

And he himself, when he feels how strong is the temptation of the devil, proclaims that he has hitherto believed in the virtuous inclination of his will:—

> O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
> With saints dost bait thy hook![4]

When, however, he has once surrendered himself to his overmastering passion, and supposes that he has obtained his desire, he proves the unfathomable baseness of his

[1] *Measure for Measure*, Act iii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 2.
[3] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 1.
[4] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 2.

nature by ordering the execution of Claudio, so that he may not appear to the world to have been false to the strict requirements of justice. The scene representing the tortuous, indirect, and insinuating approaches, by which Angelo seeks to disguise from Isabella the real character of his proposal, till her virgin innocence and purity force him to speak plainly, is perhaps unequalled in dramatic poetry; and if the action could have been maintained throughout at this level, *Measure for Measure* might have been ranked as the greatest of Shakespeare's plays.

But there is a fatal weakness in the *dénouement*. It is true that, in point of mere dramatic art, Shakespeare has never shown finer skill than in applying the plot of *All's Well that Ends Well* to unravel the complicated situation, thereby getting rid of some of the moral improbability of the conclusion to the story as told by Cinthio and Whetstone. But when all is said, the artifice is one which befits comedy rather than tragedy, and after the intense imaginative emotion in the characters of Claudio, Angelo, and Isabella, the ease with which the abominable wickedness of Angelo is dismissed, in consideration of the successful trick by which he has been duped, attenuates the moral impression which the play is otherwise qualified to create. We must also deduct from the merits of *Measure for Measure* the inferior quality of the comedy. The character of Elbow is a poor reproduction of Dogberry; the other minor personages, Mistress Overdone, Pompey, and Abhorson, are representatives of the vilest professions; and though the ribald Lucio serves to bring out by contrast the snowy purity of the mind of Isabella, his nauseous discourses might have been omitted without in any way affecting the structure of the play.

All's Well that Ends Well and *Measure for Measure* are evidently closely related to each other: so too are *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*, though in quite a different way. These are probably all works of the same period. *Pericles*, as is shown by the text published in 1608, must have been produced on the stage about 1607.

The Winter's Tale was first published in the folio of 1623, but is described in that year by Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, as an "old" play, licensed by Sir George Buck. As Sir George was licenser of plays from nearly the beginning of the century, this reference does not help to make the date of composition precise, but the acting of *The Winter's Tale* is mentioned by Simon Forman in 1611, and from its general resemblance to the other two plays with which I have classed it, it may fairly be assigned to some year between that date and the representation of *Pericles.* Of *Cymbeline*, we only know that it first appears in the folio of 1623: it has points of likeness both to *Pericles* and to *The Winter's Tale;* but there is no external evidence to suggest the date of its production on the stage.

All three plays belong to a group of tragi-comedies, the incidents in them being of a tragic cast, but the conclusion happy. They differ, however, from *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, in so far as the motive of those plays is thoroughly dramatic,—having the beginning, middle, and end required by Aristotle,—while the group with which we have now to deal may rather be described as dramatised romances. In other words, an epic character prevails in them: as in the plots of the Greek novels, one or more leading personages are conducted, without any limitations of place or time, through a series of adventurous misfortunes to a state of ultimate security: moreover, in all the three plays the elements of romance are very similar. Each of them, for example, has an innocent and unfortunate heroine, Marina, Imogen, Perdita; in each of them parents lose children, who are finally restored to them. In *Pericles*, as in *The Winter's Tale*, a wife, supposed to be dead, is brought back to her husband; while in the latter play, as in *Cymbeline*, a husband, suspicious of his wife's fidelity, orders either her or her child, to be slain; the heroines of *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* have each names significant of their fortunes; in *Pericles*, Dionyza, jealous on behalf of her child, seeks to destroy Marina, just as the Queen in *Cymbeline*

attempts to remove Imogen from the succession to the kingdom, to make way for her son, Cloten.

Looking to the structure of these plays, we find that *Pericles* is founded on the prose narrative of Laurence Twine, entitled: *The Pattern of painful Adventures containing the most excellent, pleasant, and variable History of the strange accidents that befell unto Prince Apollonius, the Lady Lucina, his Wife, and Tharsia, his Daughter,* and also on Gower's story of King Appolinus of Tyre, in the *Confessio Amantis.*[1]

The progress of the action is marked by the entrance of Gower at the beginning of each act, who explains, after the manner of a chorus, the unrepresented events which are supposed to have happened in the interval. He is thrice accompanied by a Dumb Show. Both these stage devices are found in Peele's *Battle of Alcazar* The monotonous character of the blank verse, and the frequent interspersion of rhymes, in the first two acts, suggest an early date for the composition: on the other hand, the dialogue in the third and fourth acts is in Shakespeare's latest manner; and, assuming the work as a whole to be his, it seems possible—accepting the tradition of Dryden, that *Pericles* was the poet's earliest work—to conclude that in his later years he patched up his crude performance for the stage by inserting the striking episode of Marina.[2]

On the other hand, there is no sign that *Cymbeline* was one of Shakespeare's early productions The framework of the play is dramatic, being founded on Boccaccio's tale of the wager made by Bernabo Lomellia of Genoa as to his wife's virtue, and the consequences that followed.[3] With this is blended the history of Cymbeline's refusal to pay tribute to the Romans, as related by Holinshed;[4] but the two elements are so skilfully welded together by the actions of the hero Posthumus Leonatus, and the violence of the imagery and the occasional harshness

[1] *Shakespeare's Library*, Part i. vol. iv. pp. 179-334.
[2] Prologue to *Circe*.
[3] *Shakespeare's Library*, vol. ii. p. 189.
[4] Holinshed's *Chronicle* (1808), vol. i. pp. 479-480.

of the versification throughout are so much akin to the style of *The Winter's Tale*, that I am convinced the two plays belong to the same period of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

The Winter's Tale again has, like *Cymbeline*, a dramatic motive in the jealousy of Leontes; but, as in *Pericles*, the treatment of the story is epic: the fourth act opens with the entry of Time as chorus, who explains that sixteen years have gone by:—

> Your patience is allowing,
> I turn my glass and give my scene such growing
> As you had slept between: Leontes leaving,
> The effects of his fond jealousies so grieving
> That he shuts up himself, imagine we,
> Gentle spectators, that I now may be
> In fair Bohemia; and remember well,
> I mentioned a son of the king's, which Florizel
> I now name to you; and with speed so pace
> To speak of Perdita, now grown in grace
> Equal with wondering: what of her ensues
> I list not prophesy; but let Time's news
> Be known when 'tis brought forth.

Shakespeare was compelled to adopt this device because the action of the play follows closely the incidents of Greene's romance called *Pandosto*. He had at an earlier date used the plot of Lodge's *Euphues' Golden Legacy* for *As You Like It*, but in that case the story, condensed into a brief period of time, and culminating in the various scenes of Arden, gave him an opportunity of concentrating his whole philosophy of life round the idea of Arcadia; while in *The Winter's Tale* the moral of the play could not be evolved till the close of a long series of adventures, requiring the lapse of years and frequent changes of scene.

When we turn away from the epic materials and dramatic structure of these plays, to search for the lyrical or personal feeling that gives them their poetry, I think it will be found that they are animated by two dominant motives. One of them is philosophical and emotional. Whatever may have been the cause, it is clear that in *Cymbeline* and in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare's imagina-

tion is dwelling profoundly on the effects of the passion of jealousy, which he had first represented in *Othello*. Each of these three plays exhibits the awful torments of mind produced by the belief of any human soul that the object of its love is false and unworthy. By this link they are all connected with Sonnets cxxvii.-clii., and especially cxlvii.—

> My love is as a fever, longing still
> For that which longer nurseth the disease,
> Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
> The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
> My reason, the physician to my love,
> Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
> Hath left me, and I desperate now approve
> Desire is death, which physic did except.
> Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
> And frantic-mad with evermore unrest;
> My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's are,
> At random from the truth vainly expressed;
> For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright,
> Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

Let this be compared with *Othello*, Act iv. Sc. 2, and, in the terrific speech of the Moor, it will be seen that the feeling is the same:—

> Had it pleased heaven
> To try me with affliction; had they rained
> All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,
> Steeped me in poverty to the very lips,
> Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
> I should have found in some place of my soul
> A drop of patience but, alas, to make me
> A fixed figure for the time of scorn
> To point his slow unmoving finger at!
> Yet could I bear that too; well, very well·
> But there, where I have garnered up my heart,
> Where either I must live, or bear no life;
> The fountain from the which my current runs,
> Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!
> Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
> To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,
> Patience, thou young and rose-lipped cherubin,—
> Ay, there, look grim as hell!

Could Shakespeare have written thus if he had not

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> Ay, there, look grim as hell!

Could Shakespeare have written thus if he had not

himself experienced the passion? Not less personal in its intense bitterness is the speech of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, Act ii. Sc. 5:—

> Is there no way for men to be, but women
> Must be half-workers?

and in the same vein Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale*, Act i. Sc. 2, pours forth his sarcasms on marriage:—

> There have been,
> Or I am much deceived, etc.

Assuming all these ideal creations to have a groundwork in personal experience, how infinite seems the power and grandeur of that imagination which, instead of indulging itself lyrically in a wretched publication of its own sufferings, created the dramatic situations where jealousy is exhibited, working its wicked will on the noble and innocent figures of Desdemona, Hermione, and Imogen!

CHAPTER VI

SHAKESPEARE'S LATER TRAGEDIES

In the interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedies it is important to bear three things in mind: (1) that between 1595 or 1596, the probable date of the production of *Romeo and Juliet*, and 1600, the earliest date that can be assigned for the production of *Hamlet*, the poet composed no pure tragedies, and that after 1600 he produced no pure comedy; (2) that his later tragedies combine the Machiavellian principle of tragic action found in his early tragedies, with the principle of philosophic reflection so strongly developed in *As You Like It*, *King Henry IV.*, and *King Henry V*; (3) that through these late works runs a vein of passionate thought and emotion, which seems to indicate that the poet's choice of dramatic materials had been affected by some profound change in his whole view of life. The tragedies fall naturally into two classes: those that are constructed on the base of some well-known story or historic legend—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*, which are essentially tragedies of incident and action; and those that derive their fable from Greek and Roman history—*Timon*, *Coriolanus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, which are, in the main, tragedies of character.

The first of the mature series of tragedies was *Hamlet*, which, judging from internal evidence, must have been first played soon after 1600. On the moral significance

of this tragedy volumes have been—not unnaturally—written; but its leading motive has never been better described than in a sentence of Goethe: "To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it." What there is in *Hamlet* beyond this may be more safely inferred from a few suggestive facts than from pages of *a priori* reasoning, however ingenious. And in the first place, it is of the greatest importance to observe that there was evidently a play called *Hamlet* older than Shakespeare's. References to it are made as early as 1589 by Nash in his Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*;[1] by Henslowe in his diary of June 9, 1594, where he mentions the profit he himself derived from the play;[2] and by Lodge in his *Wits Miserie*, published in 1596.[3] Some scholars have inferred that the play so referred to is Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (which, in that case, would have been one of his earliest works); that the quarto published in 1603 shows the form in which the tragedy was originally produced; and that the text of the quarto published in 1604, which is substantially identical with that of the folio of 1623, is a recast of the first draft of the tragedy. But against this it must be urged, first, that the wretched and imperfect text of the quarto of 1603 could never have come under the revising eye of Shakespeare, being plainly only a version of the play taken down by some shorthand reporter from the lips of the actors; secondly, that, if Shakespeare's *Hamlet* had been in existence in 1598, it would certainly have been mentioned by Meres; and

[1] See vol. ii. p. 423.

[2] "9 of June 1594 . . . at hamlet . . . viii.s/."

[3] In this book a fiend is described as "a foul lubber, and looks as pale as the vizard of the ghost who cried so miserably at the theatre, 'Hamlet, Revenge!'" Gabriel Harvey makes an entry respecting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a copy of Speght's edition of Chaucer dated 1598:—"The younger sort take much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, but his *Lucrece* and his tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, have it in them to please the wiser sort." Stevens thought this entry was made as early as 1598, but Malone, who saw the book, considers that it was probably inserted after 1600.

thirdly, that no one who accepts the account of Shakespeare's dramatic development given in the foregoing pages can suppose that in 1589 he would have been likely to conceive the tragedy, even as it appears in the quarto of 1603. The play referred to by Nash, Henslowe, and Lodge was in all probability the work of Kyd, and would have been constructed on the Machiavellian lines laid down by Marlowe and developed in *The Spanish Tragedy;* in other words, we may fairly presume that it represented a resolute action of revenge, worked out according to the incidents of the story of Hamlet related by Belleforest. The ghost referred to by Lodge was doubtless only one of those prologising spectres imitated from the *Thyestes* of Seneca, such as we find in *The Misfortunes of Arthur* and *The Spanish Tragedy;* Hamlet himself would have appeared in the play as a resolute prince determined to revenge the death of his father, just as old Jeronymo revenges the death of his son.

Shakespeare used the same materials as the earlier playwright, but conceived the situation in an entirely different spirit. His Hamlet is a dramatic example not of resolution but of irresolution; he is the exact opposite of Barabas and Jeronymo, and also of Henry V. The duty of resolute action was imposed on the Prince of Denmark, as it was imposed on Henry of Monmouth by the revolt of the Percies; the latter acted with energy when the time called for action; Hamlet only recognises, from the example of Fortinbras, that he ought to act:—

> How all occasions do inform against me,
> And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more
>
> . . . .
>
> To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event,
> A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever three parts coward, I do not know
> Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do";

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father killed, a mother stained,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and a trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth![1]

Why, then, did Hamlet pause? Not, I think, altogether for the reasons supposed by Goethe: the cause was rather a constitutional defect of character. Possessed of the double nature which appears also in Henry V., the contemplative element in the Prince of Denmark so strongly overbalances the active, that his passions and conscience fail to afford an adequate stimulus to his will. Under the pressure of circumstances he can behave with energy, as when he confronts his mother and compels her to recognise that he is not really mad, or when he alters the King's letters so as to ensure the destruction of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But, his resolution being fitful and capricious, he is unable to persevere in a steady course of revenge: his arbitrary assumption of the character of *madman* causes him first to murder Polonius by mistake, and then to overthrow the reason of Ophelia, whom he loves; the postponement of his vengeance brings about the death, not only of the guilty king, but of his own mother, of Laertes, of himself. Many intellectual

[1] *Hamlet*, Act iv. Sc. 4.

influences combine to restrain him from the execution of the purpose to which his intellect directs him. First of all, his sense of irony: he is—as Prince Henry also was to some extent—"in love with vanity": his sceptical analysis is constantly suggesting to him the unreality of things:—

HAMLET. To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole?
HORATIO. 'Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so.
HAM. No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it: as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam, whereto he was converted, might they not stop a beer-barrel?
Imperious Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:
O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw![1]

This is a line of thought which we have seen manifesting itself in many of the earlier plays. It is the philosophical view of Theseus in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*:—

The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination but amend them;—

and of Jaques in *As You Like It*:—

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;—

it is Prospero's moral in *The Tempest*:—

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Again, Hamlet is restrained from action of any kind, even from suicide, by his vivid imagination, his fear of the unseen. He reasons, up to a certain point, like the writer of Sonnet lxvi.:—

[1] *Hamlet*, Act v. Sc. 1.

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly doctor-like controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tired with all these, from these I would be gone.[1]

Within a world so full of evil Hamlet is kept by "the dread of something after death":—

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.[2]

Finally, Hamlet finds a reason for inaction in the sceptical fear that his senses themselves may have betrayed him, and that the admonitions of the ghost may be a device of the Evil One:—

The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me.[3]

When all this is contrasted with such completely mechanical examples of resolution as we find in the speeches of Aaron, York and Richard III. we must conclude that Shakespeare's whole conception of the value of *virtù* as a dramatic principle had altered. He had, as we have seen, begun his career as a disciple of Marlowe. Mar-

[1] Compare with this Sonnet *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 1: "To be or not to be," etc.

[2] *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

[3] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 2.

lowe's view of the drama of life was in effect an atheistic one. He delighted to exhibit the onward course of a resolute will in pursuit of a selfish purpose, victorious over difficulties, and only checked in its successful career by some sudden turn in the wheel of fortune. Shakespeare, in his earlier tragedies, without sharing Marlowe's religious beliefs, had effectively employed the Machiavellian principle for stage purposes. In *Titus Andronicus* he had represented the actions of bloody revenge devised by Titus and Tamora; he had exhibited evil resolutely pursued for its own sake in the person of Aaron. But self-examination and the study of history, particularly English history, widened and deepened his conceptions of life: he learned that the human will is checked by forces outside itself, and that selfishness has to reckon with other and more spiritual powers than those of fortune. In the Hubert of *King John*, in the Cardinal Beaufort of *Henry VI.*, most of all in the closing scenes of *Richard III.*, the poet showed his appreciation both of the restraining and the retributive functions of conscience, as he must so often have seen them represented in an abstract form in the plots of the old Moralities. With a full sense of growing dramatic power, he proceeded to represent, in the famous soliloquy of Falstaff, the mind of man reasoning with itself on the conflicting claims of life and honour; the passionate desire for fame and honour, as expressed by Hotspur; the resolves of honour and patriotism, equally magnanimous and philosophical, in the character of Henry V. He now conceived all these conflicting motives of action operating on a mind endowed with the strongest powers of reflection, in such a manner as to produce the tragic state of irresolution illustrated in the character of Hamlet.

In this conception of character there is nothing abstract; all is positively and universally true. The poet enters with the liveliest sympathy into the legendary story; his moral ideas are so distributed between the *dramatis personæ* that each child of his imagination becomes a distinct and characteristic being, reflecting light from

himself on to the central figure of the play. The Machiavellian King, murderer and hypocrite as he is, is not less sensitive to the stings of conscience than Hamlet:—

> O, 'tis too true!
> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word:
> O heavy burthen![1]

and, when alone, the murderer confesses his guilt with agonising prayers to heaven. Polonius, with his formal wisdom, the fruits of outward experience and observation, offers exactly the contrast required to the introspective reasoning of Hamlet: the blind filial affection of Laertes, whose desire for revenge makes him so ready an instrument of the villainous King, brings the irresolution of the Prince into stronger relief; the admiration of the latter for the firm and balanced character of Horatio helps to reveal the defects of his own nature. Even in the structure of the tragedy we can see how ingeniously Shakespeare has converted the conventions of the stage (which were probably all of the play that the majority of the audience were capable of understanding) into instruments for the expression of his own philosophical conceptions; how, for example, he has elevated Kyd's stage ghost into a sublime and awful being; to what perfection he has carried the "wit" proper to the underplots of Lyly in the episode of the grave-diggers; with what skill he has made use of the person of the courtier Osric to reflect on the affected euphuism of polite society.

Othello was acted before James I. in November 1604, and in the absence of any earlier mention of the tragedy, or any internal evidence to indicate the date of composition, it may be set down as belonging to that year.[2] This play

[1] *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

[2] See *Shakespeare*, xiv. Halliwell, in his *Life of Shakespeare*, p. 190, quotes from a MS. by J. M. Gent, 1600, some lines which he thinks were copied from Iago's speech, Act iii. Sc. 3: "who steals my purse steals trash." But it appears from Halliwell's own statement that some portions of the MS. were added after 1600.

is founded on a tale of Giraldi Cinthio in the *Hecatommithi;* Shakespeare altered a few of the details in the story, but preserved the outlines. He breathed, however, into the bald narrative a power and personality which, as in *Hamlet*, make the reader feel that the play has been written with the poet's own life-blood. The dramatic principle of *virtù* is now shown in a new light. Iago, the most thoroughly Machiavellian figure on the English stage, is not, like Barabas or Richard III., the hero of the play, but his revenge is the hinge upon which the whole plot turns. After explaining the injury he has received from Othello, Iago says to Roderigo:—

Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor.
ROD. I would not follow him then.
IAGO. O, sir, content you;
I follow him to serve my turn upon him:
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashiered:
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them and when they have lined their coats
Do themselves homage . these fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.[1]

[1] *Othello*, Act i. Sc. i.

It will be observed that, in this announcement of firm resolution, Shakespeare gets quite free from the melodramatic element which mixes itself in the representation of such characters as Aaron and Richard III. There is nothing ideally improbable in the plot of *Othello*, or in the character of Iago: the play exhibits the tragic effects that can be produced by absolute selfishness working under the control of intellect on the passions and credulity of men. When Iago has settled on his end he allows no consideration to bar his way; he recognises in his soliloquies that what he recommends to others is the "divinity of hell"; but as it serves his interest it is to be followed. By the devilishness of his intellect he obtains an advantage over all the other actors in the tragedy; because their judgments are clouded by mists of human weakness and passion, which enable him to present falsehood to them under the appearance of truth and reality. Iago knows precisely what argument will have weight with each particular disposition. From Roderigo, as much fool as knave, he does not attempt to conceal his own selfish motives, understanding that his dupe will do anything he is told, when there seems to be a prospect of gratifying his blind passion for Desdemona. In his case a weak will requires to be encouraged by philosophy:—

RODERIGO. What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO. Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.[1]

Over the nobler characters Iago gains his ascendency by their belief in the heartiness, honesty, and good fellowship, underlying his blunt speech. Cassio, for example, thinks that Iago is only advising him in his own interest to entreat the mediation of Desdemona with her husband:—

[1] *Othello*, Act i. Sc. 3.

CASSIO. You advise me well.

IAGO. I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness

CAS. I think it freely; and betimes in the morning I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me: I am desperate of my fortunes if they check me here.

IAGO. You are in the right. Good night, lieutenant. I must to the watch.

CAS. Good night, honest Iago. [*Exit*]

IAGO. And what's he then that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? etc., etc.[1]

He gains Othello's credence by pretending a reluctance to disclose his suspicions lest these should lower him in the Moor's opinion:—

It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.

OTHELLO. What dost thou mean?

IAGO. Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.[2]

At the same time the clearness of his professedly materialistic principles gives him an immense advantage over the sound but unreasoning instincts of those whom he deludes. Desdemona is deceived by his blunt cynicism, because, in the purity of her mind, she does not believe him to be in earnest. Roderigo, human, though a fool, refuses to believe in Desdemona's levity:—

ROD. I cannot believe that in her; she's full of most blessed condition.

IAGO. Blessed fig's-end! the wine she drinks is made of grapes: if she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor.[3]

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[1] *Othello*, Act ii. Sc. 3.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 3.
[3] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 1.

As to Othello, Iago himself allows that he "is of a constant, loving, noble nature,"[1] and the Moor is at first firmly possessed with the belief in the innocence and goodness of his wife; but Iago knows how to work on his jealous disposition, and when suspicion has once obtained a lodgment in his mind, Othello's nature is not sufficiently elevated to resist the apparently irresistible material evidence of Desdemona's guilt which is laid before him.

In commenting on *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, I have noted the attraction which this passion seems to have had for Shakespeare's imagination; nor can I doubt that the poet wrote from the depths of personal experience the lines in *Othello* :—

> Look, where he comes! Not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst yesterday.[2]

The more wonderful seems to be the power of the creative imagination which, with such an extraordinary power of self-analysis, so completely suppressed the poet's own personality in the drama; which from the commonplace story of Cinthio called into being not only the character of Iago, but the episode of the love-making of Othello and Desdemona, the drunkenness of Cassio, the contrast in the persons of Desdemona and Emilia, the exquisite poetry in the incident of the handkerchief. Neither in this play nor in *Macbeth* is there any check in the action interfering with the power of tragedy to effect "through pity and fear the purgation of these emotions."

Macbeth combines some of the elements of *Hamlet* and *Othello*. The central situation is essentially the same as in *Hamlet*, an irresolute will at once impelled to and restrained from action by opposing desires and considerations. The characters and circumstances of each, however, are radically different. Both are capable of "looking before and after," but Hamlet is called upon to act by filial affection,

[1] *Othello* Act ii. Sc. 1.

[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 3.

and what he considers the duty of revenge: he is checked by his doubts. Macbeth is urged on by merely selfish ambition, and is restrained only by the fear of the material consequences. Where Hamlet says:—

> The dread of something after death,
> The undiscovered country from whose bourn
> No traveller returns, puzzles the will
> And makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of;[1]

Macbeth reasons:—

> If the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> *We'ld jump the life to come.*[2]

So that while Hamlet, reflective, conscientious, even religious, doubts whether his father's ghost may not be a temptation sent by the Evil One, Macbeth, merely superstitious, seeks to strengthen himself in his resolution by the prophecies of the Weird Sisters. Yet when he reflects on all the consequences of his intended crime he shrinks from his purpose, like Hamlet:—

> I have no spur
> To prick the sides of my intent, but only
> Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
> And falls on the other.[3]

At this point, however, Macbeth is supplied, for the execution of crime, with the external stimulus that Hamlet lacks for the performance of what he feels to be his duty. Lady Macbeth represents in the play the principle of Resolution, and, like Iago in *Othello*, her business is to fortify the infirm purpose of her partner. Her mind being fixed on its end, she puts aside all imagination, and she knows how to work upon her husband's nature:—

[1] *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Macbeth*, Act i. Sc. 7. [3] *Ibid.*

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' the adage?[1]

At a much earlier period in his dramatic career Shakespeare had conceived the germs of Lady Macbeth's character in the ambitious Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, who strives to arouse her husband's energies by her own:—

Why doth the great Duke Humphrey knit his brows,
As frowning at the favours of the world?
Why are thine eyes fixed to the sullen earth,
Gazing on that which seems to dim thy sight?
What seest thou there? King Henry's diadem,
Enchased with all the honours of the world?
If so, gaze on, and grovel on thy face,
Until thy head be circled with the same.
Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold.
What, is't too short? I'll lengthen it with mine;
And, having both together heaved it up,
We'll both together lift our heads to heaven
And never more abase our sight so low
As to vouchsafe one glance unto the ground.[2]

The contrast between the ambition of the virile woman and that of the irresolute man is, in *Macbeth*, carried out to the end of the play with splendid skill. As long as moral energy can confront the world, Lady Macbeth bears up against remorse, conscience, imagination. She is not a woman to see ghosts, and even when Macbeth breaks down at the banquet she can dismiss the guests with dignity. But her husband, having proved himself unequal to his position, her physical powers collapse under the moral strain on her mind, the terrific force of which is so magnificently expressed in the sleep-walking

[1] *Macbeth*, Act i. Sc. 7.
[2] *Henry VI.* Part 2, Act i. Sc. 2.

scene. Macbeth, on the contrary, recovers himself when his strong imagination has been fortified by the delusive prophecy, that he shall remain unvanquished till Birnam wood shall come to Dunsinane, and invulnerable by any born of woman; and even after the fallacy of his hopes is revealed, his irresolution is lost in despair; he dies fighting.

This play, first printed in the folio of 1623, was probably produced in the winter of 1605;[1] it was followed by *King Lear*, the last of Shakespeare's tragedies founded on legendary action, probably acted for the first time in the course of 1606. Beyond any of his works (with the possible exception of *The Merchant of Venice*) *King Lear* illustrates the poet's extraordinary power of fusing conflicting elements into an organic action. *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth* are dramatic versions of single stories already in existence; *King Lear*, on the other hand, combines the well-known legend of the king and his daughters—already told with many variations by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, Layamon, Spenser, and Holinshed—with the tale of the King of Paphlagonia and his two sons related in Sidney's *Arcadia*, and to this again is added the episode of Edgar (the equivalent of Leonatus in Sidney's narrative) in his character of Tom of Bedlam, a part apparently suggested by Samuel Harsnett's *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, published in 1603, which contains the names of the different fiends mentioned in the tragedy.[2]

Not less complex is the spirit of the play, for while the other tragedies (with the exception of two short scenes in *Macbeth* and *Othello*) exclude deliberately comic representation, one of the most important figures in *King Lear* is the King's fool, whose discourse is as professionally witty as that of Touchstone in *As You Like It*. In this respect the tragedy reverts to the earlier type exemplified in *Romeo and Juliet*, and, indeed, at first sight it seems as

[1] As to the reasons for assigning this date see Collier's *Shakespeare* (2nd edition), vol. v. pp. 213-215

[2] Hunter's *New Illustrations of Shakespeare*, vol. ii. pp. 267-269

if the poet had in these two plays intended to rouse pity and fear, after the Greek fashion, by an action of misfortune and destiny, rather than, as in the dramas immediately preceding *King Lear*, by an exhibition of the tragic effects of the conflict between the passions and the will. Evil prevails almost to the close; the fortunes of the good and innocent Cordelia, the honest Kent, the dutiful Edgar, all involved in a common ruin, not from their own fault, but from the errors or crimes of others, leave us with a sense of inequality in the distribution of happiness and misery. Added to this, the spectacle of the pitiless war of the elements against the aged and discrowned Lear, and the forlorn wanderings of the sightless Gloucester, intensify the gloom of the action, so that we instinctively recall in Lear and Cordelia the figures of Œdipus and Antigone, and the words of Aristotle describing the action of a perfect tragedy: "The change of fortune should not be from bad to good, but, reversely, from good to bad. It should come about as the result not of vice, but of some great error or frailty, in a character such as we have described, or better rather than worse." [1]

But in so judging we should miss half the greatness of Shakespeare's conception. It is true that the view of the world presented to us in *Lear* is stern and terrible, but it does not reflect upon divine justice. Looking below the surface, we see how large a part of the situation is the product of the perversity and corruption of the human will. Lear's misfortunes primarily spring from his arbitrary and impulsive nature: Gloucester pays the penalty for the self-indulgence which, at the opening of the play, he himself judges with so much levity. As the philosophic Edgar says:—

> The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
> Do make us plagues to scourge us.[2]

Nor do the more determined evil-doers escape retribution;

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, cap. xiii. 4.
[2] *King Lear*, Act v. Sc. 3

the wicked daughters of the King, crossing each other's selfish purposes, perish respectively by murder and suicide; in their case—

> This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble
> Touches us not with pity.[1]

The innocent victims of evil are to be restored, as far as may be. Albany says:—

> What comfort to this great decay may come
> Shall be applied: for us, we will resign,
> During the life of this old majesty,
> To him our absolute power: [*To Edgar and Kent*] you,
> to your rights;
> With boot, and such addition as your honours
> Have more than merited. All friends shall taste
> The wages of their virtue, and all our foes
> The cup of their deservings.[2]

Thus the play comprehensively illustrates both Marlowe's tragic principle of Will resolved in the pursuit of its own ends, and the Greek tragic principle of divine Nemesis following the commission of sin from one generation to another. The mediæval doctrine of the vanity of the world—the mainspring of works like *The Fall of Princes* and *The Mirror for Magistrates*—is made to modify the doctrine of Machiavelli, that all things are permissible to absolute Power.

It is impossible to estimate too highly the dramatic skill with which Shakespeare has worked out this mixed conception, by combining the legend of King Lear with Sidney's story of the King of Paphlagonia and his two sons. Lear and Gloucester, the chief sufferers in the play, are men of that imperfect character which Aristotle requires in the chief figures of tragedy: the King with a large, noble, generous and loving disposition, marred by the arbitrary impulses of a despot, as he shows by his unjust treatment of Cordelia and Kent; Gloucester feeble, timid and pleasure-loving, but loyal, kind-hearted and affectionate.

[1] *King Lear*, Act v. Sc. 3. [2] *Ibid.* Act v Sc. 3

The selfishly resolute characters—Edmund, Cornwall, Goneril and Regan—turn to their own advantage the weakness and folly of their elders. While the latter are in power, they flatter their credulity; when they have gained their ends, they trample their benefactors under foot. In particular, the character of Edmund (who answers to Sidney's Plexirtus) illustrates the Machiavellian principle. He has the intellect and selfish craft of Iago, but his nature is not without an element of nobility, which appears in his dying moments:—

> EDMUND. What you have charged me with, that have I done;
> And more, much more; the time will bring it out:
> 'Tis past, and so am I. But what art thou
> That hast this fortune on me? If thou'rt noble,
> I do forgive thee.[1]

And again:—

> This speech of yours hath moved me,
> And shall perchance do good.[2]

And:—

> I pant for life: some good I mean to do,
> Despite of mine own nature.[3]

In a certain sense he is the victim of his father's selfishness. He is a bastard, and on this consideration he bases his egotistic philosophy:—

> Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
> My services are bound. Wherefore should I
> Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
> The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
> For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
> Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
> As honest madam's issue?
> . . . . . .
> Well, then,
> Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:
> Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund,
> As to the legitimate: fine word,—legitimate!

[1] *King Lear*, Act v. Sc. 3.
[2] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 3. [3] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 3.

Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper:
Now, gods, stand up for bastards.[1]

He reasons, like Iago with Roderigo, about his father's superstitious belief in the influence of the planets over human actions:—

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune,—often the surfeit of our own behaviour,—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves and treachers, by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa major; so that it follows, I am rough and lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am,[2] had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardising.

And, as with Iago, his great knowledge of the human heart enables him easily to make the infirmities or virtues of others the instruments of his own designs:—

A credulous father! and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none: on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy! I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit.[3]

[1] *King Lear*, Act i. Sc. 2.

[2] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 2. The recurrence of this, or similar phrases, in Shakespeare is noticeable; it seems to express the pith of the Machiavellian philosophy, though it is employed in very different moods. Thus in Sonnet cxxi. Shakespeare says of himself:—

I am that I am, and they that level
At my abuses reckon up their own.

Iago, in *Othello*, Act i. Sc. 1, says that when his "outward action" demonstrates "the native act and figure" of his heart, he will say: "I am not what I am." And Richard III. says, in his last soliloquy, "Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I."—Act v. Sc. 3.

[3] *King Lear*, Act i. Sc. 2.

Between the chief sufferers and the evil-doers in the play stands the group of honest characters—Kent, the supposed serving-man, Edgar, the pretended madman, and the Fool—who serve to set forth the poet's philosophy; and Shakespeare's art is nowhere more strikingly exhibited than in the skill with which he uses these dramatic figures for his own moral purposes. What doubtless pleased the majority of the audience in *King Lear* was that which still mainly delights English theatrical audiences—the imitation, not of ideas, but of external objects. This is plainly shown by the title-page of the play as published in the quarto of 1608: "M. William Shakespeare, his true Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three daughters, with the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam." No doubt this would have led the spectators to expect in the underplot of this play that which they had been treated to from the days of the earliest Miracle Plays, the faithful copy on the stage of some curious or grotesque object with which they were familiar in real life. Just as it was the audience who were the indirect inspirers of such scenes as Launce and his dog in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, of Autolycus' rogueries in *The Winter's Tale*, and of the marriage of Touchstone in *As You Like It*, so the audience—which certainly did not feel the whole dramatic irony of the different situations in *King Lear* or *Hamlet*—liked to see Kent sitting in the stocks, Lear sheltering in the hut from the storm, the grave-diggers chattering in Ophelia's grave.

Shakespeare, seizing on this taste, elevated the objects which gratified it into the ideal regions of poetry. By means of the spectators' delight in seeing familiar realities faithfully imitated by skilful actors, he revealed the elemental truth of nature, as contrasted with the simulation and hypocrisy of mankind. The honest plain-speaking of Kent is required as a dramatic contrast to the crafty flatteries of Lear's daughters; the bluntness of his manners in service illustrates the fawning

has sent for merely for his amusement) at once begins to put the truth before him in the plainest way, and when the King, displeased, threatens to have him whipped, the Fool claims his privilege of free speech. The King is thus forced to reflect, and thence, by the finest gradations, he is brought to laugh at himself with a merriment already verging upon madness :—

FOOL. If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I'd have thee beaten for being old before thy time.
LEAR. How 's that?
FOOL. Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.
LEAR. O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
Keep me in temper: I would not be mad![1]

Like Touchstone, the Fool in *Lear* has the clearest perception of material things in themselves. When, in the midst of the storm, Lear calls upon the thunder to smite the world of "ingrateful man," the Fool observes :—

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters' blessing: here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.[2]

When the King proceeds to upbraid the elements with being his daughters' "servile ministers," the Fool recalls to him indirectly that he has only himself to blame; and Lear perceives that he is right :—

FOOL. He that has a house to put's head in has a good head-piece.

. . . .

The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake.
For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass.
LEAR. No, I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say nothing.[3]

Gradually personal sympathy with the Fool's physical

[1] *King Lear*, Act i. Sc. 5.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2.
[3] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2.

discomfort shows Lear that in the face of the tyranny of Nature all men are, in a sense, equal:—

LEAR. My wits begin to turn.
Come on, my boy: how dost, my boy? art cold?
I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel.
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That's sorry yet for thee.
FOOL (*singing*). *He that has and a little tiny wit,*—
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,—
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day.
LEAR. True, my good boy. Come, bring us to this hovel.[1]

King Lear is a play characteristic of the final phase in Shakespeare's dramatic career. It has less dramatic unity than *Macbeth*, *Othello*, or even *Hamlet;* it does not represent, like these tragedies, the evolution of a single action founded on a legendary tale; the episode of Gloucester, for example, is not essentially necessary to the structure of the play, and the effect of combining it with the historical legend is to divide the interest between the calamities of Lear, the sufferings of Gloucester, and the misfortunes of Edgar. The element of contemplation in *King Lear* prevails over the element of action . it is a play fitted for the study rather than the stage, giving a philosophic and comprehensive view of the world and of human nature, without paying much attention to the progress of the plot from one point to another. This characteristic links it to the group of tragedies which (with one exception, *Julius Cæsar*) formed certainly some of Shakespeare's last work for the theatre, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*. All these resemble each other in certain marked particulars. Their subjects are taken either from Plutarch's *Lives* or from the mediæval story of the Trojan war. They are dependent for their interest rather on the exhibition of character than on the development of a plot. Like *King Lear*, they dwell on a certain well-defined philo-

[1] *King Lear*, Act iii. Sc. 2.

sophic view of men and things. Sometimes they represent the consequences of moral excess in different forms, as of pride in Coriolanus, sensual love in Antony, prodigal benevolence in Timon. Elsewhere we find studies of excess in the characters of women, as in Cressida and Cleopatra. The vice of ingratitude, which is the cause of madness in Lear, is the cause of misanthropy in Timon. While in *Julius Cæsar* and *Coriolanus* we see the changing disposition of the crowd towards the individual, *Timon* and *Troilus and Cressida* are studies of the varying behaviour of individuals in their dealings with the world. Full of profound thought and close observation, these tragedies are evidently the fruits of personal experience, and it is observable that, from *King Lear* onwards, Shakespeare's modes of expression become far more obscure and metaphysical than is usual in the earlier plays.

Such changes of style point to an inward revolution in the mind of the poet, and though I do not wish to press the evidence beyond what is reasonable, I cannot help thinking that the key-note for interpreting all Shakespeare's tragedies is to be found in the Sonnets. For assuming, as I think we ought to assume, that these poems are the offspring of real emotion, it is plain that we there find, treated in a lyric form, many of the ideas, opinions, and sentiments, which are dramatically expressed in the tragedies. The picture presented to us in the Sonnets is that of a soul divided against itself by the perpetual conflict between its higher and lower parts, and although the poet turns his gaze inwards, he is always reflecting the universal struggle of human nature spoken of in Scripture: "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." In Shakespeare's tragedies the moral war between Good and Evil, between the Passions and the Enlightened Will, is represented sometimes by the struggles of conscience in the souls of hesitating men like Hamlet, Macbeth, Angelo, and sometimes by the spectacle

of a strong will, such as that of Iago, Edmund, or Lady Macbeth, acting upon an irresolute or credulous fellow-creature. In the Sonnets the inward strife is allegorised by the dramatic contest between the good and bad angels of the old Moralities; but beyond this internal sphere of conflict lies the world at large, into contact with which man's soul is brought by all the desires and faculties which impel him to action. So long as he can satisfy his desires with an object of ideal love, he can afford to disregard his outward fortunes (Sonnet xxix.):—

> When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state
> And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
> And look upon myself and curse my fate,
> Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
> Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
> Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
> With what I most enjoy contented least;
> Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
> Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
> Like to the lark at break of day arising
> From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
> For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
> That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

It is easy from this to conceive of the mood of mind in which he would have written the lines (Sonnet cxxi.):—

> 'Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed,
> When not to be receives reproach of being,
> And the just pleasure lost which is so deemed
> Not by our feeling but by others' seeing.

Nor is it more difficult to divine what depths of spiritual experience a spirit so observant of its own life and motion must have sounded during the period of intense mental suffering. On the assumption that the Sonnets were composed at different times, between the date at which the earliest specimens were published in 1598, and the appearance of the entire collection in 1609, it will at once appear probable that the emotions thus vividly and lyrically expressed in the poet's own person are also the inspiring source of the sentiments which he puts into the mouths of a great variety of ideal characters. And as in

King Lear we may see, mitigated and modified by reason and reflection, a dramatic image of that personal despondency which is so marked in the Sonnets, so we may perhaps assume that, in the series of tragedies founded on tales or histories of the old world, the poet selected those subjects which seemed to him the most fitting vehicles for the expression of his own spiritual experiences.

This dominant contemplative tendency in tragedy first appears in *Julius Cæsar*, a play which seems to have been in existence in 1601.[1] It is plain that the inspiring motive of this drama is not the idea of representing the external action of the death of Cæsar, for not only does Cæsar himself play a secondary part in it, but (though the first portion is written with admirable dramatic skill) it is protracted for two whole acts beyond his assassination. The design of the poet seems to have been first to exhibit the conflict of motives in a virtuous mind impelled to a questionable action; secondly, to show the motives prevailing with less noble characters; and finally, the manner in which the crowd is persuaded to judge of the nature of such actions. Shakespeare had evidently much sympathy with the character of Brutus, as he is represented in the play, not, I think, as Mr. Swinburne supposes, on political grounds, but because Brutus is, like Hamlet, one of those divided natures in the observation of which the poet took so much delight:—

> But let not therefore my good friends be grieved—
> Among which number, Cassius, be you one—
> Nor construe any further my neglect,
> Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
> Forgets the shows of love to other men.[2]

Honour, the principle so powerful with Hotspur and Henry V., is the main-spring of Brutus' actions:—

> If it be aught towards the general good,
> Set honour in one eye and death i' the other,
> And I will look on both indifferently,
> For let the gods so speed me as I love
> The name of honour more than I fear death.[3]

[1] Mark Antony's oration is referred to in Weever's *Triumph of Martyrs*, published in that year.

[2] *Julius Cæsar*, Act i. Sc. 2.

[3] *Ibid.* Act i. Sc. 2.

He concludes that Honour bids him kill Cæsar:—

> It must be by his death: and for my part,
> I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
> But for the general.[1]

Hence his suffering:—

> Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar
> I have not slept.
> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream·
> The Genius and the mortal instruments
> Are then in council; and the state of man,
> Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
> The nature of an insurrection.[2]

But Brutus does not hesitate, after Hamlet's fashion, in his resolution; and the purity of his motives is apparent in his appeal to the people: "Believe me for mine honour, and have respect to mine honour that you may believe;"[3] as well as in his reproaches to Cassius for not sending him money:—

> By heaven, I had rather coin my heart,
> And drop my blood for drachmas, than to wring
> From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash
> By any indirection[4]

He rose against Cæsar, not, as he says, "that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more";[5] and in this "general honest thought" he learns to suppress all personal feeling, such as his friendship for Cæsar and even his affection for his wife Portia.

Cassius, on the other hand, as he frankly avows, is inspired to action by the selfish passion of Envy. He cannot bear the supremacy of one whom he feels to be only his equal, and in some respects his inferior Yet this man understands the working of the more elevated sentiments, and the main interest of his character lies in the influence he exercises upon persons so different as Brutus and Casca.

[1] *Julius Cæsar*, Act ii. Sc 1.
[2] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 1.
[3] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2
[4] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 3
[5] *Ibid* Act iii. Sc. 2.

He undertakes to reveal Brutus to himself, and, with as much skill, though in a more elevated spirit than Iago, he moulds the other to his purposes by making "honour the subject of his story."[1] Like Cassius, the other conspirators, as Antony says at the close of the play, "did what they did in envy of great Cæsar;"[2] but the quality of their envy is finely discriminated from his who is the soul of the plot; the characters of the blunt Casca and the dissembling Decius Brutus are imagined with extraordinary vivacity from stray hints in Plutarch, while the figure of Caius Ligarius, rising from his sick-bed and prepared, in his enthusiastic loyalty, to do anything that Brutus bids him, is the lively offspring of Shakespeare's own brain.

Most interesting, however, of all the features of the play is the representation the poet gives of the people. He who had already portrayed the insurrection of Cade, who had conceived and executed the individual characters of Dogberry, Verges, Bottom, Nym, and Pistol, now exhibits the crowd in its capacity of judge. There is nothing in Plutarch beyond the most casual expressions to suggest that conception of the multitude which Shakespeare here presents to us—its enormous mobility, its naive perceptions, and its utter incapacity to resist the force of any argument clearly put before it. In the opening scene the people appear in their elementary mood of pleasure-seeking; immediately Flavius and Marullus appeal to their consciences by reminding them of Pompey, they steal away to their homes; after hearing Brutus, they propose to carry him to his house "with shouts and clamours"; after hearing Antony, they are ready to tear Brutus to pieces. They cannot understand abstract principles; when Brutus is addressing them, they are not really moved by his appeals to Rome, patriotism, and honour, but by their profound respect for his character; Antony, on the other hand, after skilfully flattering their hostile prejudices, begins to arrest their attention by plain arguments which every man can understand, then shows how

[1] *Julius Cæsar*, Act i. Sc. 2. [2] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 5.

their interests are touched by what has been done, then arouses curiosity and expectation by a casual reference to Cæsar's will, and, when he has their passions entirely under his control, proceeds to inflame them to the highest pitch by putting before their eyes Cæsar's mangled body and the mantle, which he had worn "that day he overcame the Nervii," rent and bloody with the daggers of the conspirators. As Iago played, with the touch of an artist, on the jealousy of Othello, and Cassius on Brutus' idea of honour, so Antony sways by his oratory the passions of the crowd. Can we doubt that the animated mixture of humour, sympathy, and disdain which inspires this representation was, in great part, the fruits of sufferings inflicted on a sensitive nature by the unjust judgments of the world?

Something of the same kind of feeling is embodied in *Troilus and Cressida*, a play which was published in 1609, apparently before it was exhibited on the stage. It is certainly much better adapted for reading than for acting. The main story—one which Boccaccio and Chaucer had made popular more than two hundred years before Shakespeare's time—has very few incidents, and depends for its interest entirely on the universal nature of the situation. Troilus' absorbing passion and Cressida's fickle levity do not furnish materials for a complicated plot, and the merit of Shakespeare's play lies in the skill with which he has converted the story of the Trojan war as a whole into a mirror reflecting varieties of human conduct and character. None of his plays contains more worldly wisdom, none more profound knowledge of the manner in which the heart of man is moved. The portraits of the proud Achilles, the "dull, brainless," but conceited Ajax, the wise Ulysses, the railing Thersites, the low Pandarus, and the shifty Cressida are masterpieces of observation; but the kernel of the play, containing the essence of Shakespeare's philosophy, lies in two scenes: one, that on which the Trojans debate upon the expediency of restoring Helen; the other that in which Ulysses works upon Achilles with indirect appeals to his pride and self-esteem. In the former Shakespeare

finds an opportunity to give a fresh dramatic interpretation of the principle of Honour, which we have so often seen exercising his imagination. Hector opens the debate by arguing on the side of reason and prudence: Troilus and Paris take the side of sentiment. Hector sums up the discussion in the following characteristic speech:—

> Paris and Troilus, you have both said well,
> And on the cause and question now in hand
> Have glozed, but superficially; not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy:
> The reasons you allege do more conduce
> To the hot passion of distempered blood
> Than to make up a free determination
> 'Twixt right and wrong, for pleasure and revenge
> Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice
> Of any true decision. Nature craves
> All dues be rendered to their owners: now,
> What nearer debt in all humanity
> Than wife is to the husband? If this law
> Of nature be corrupted through affection,
> And that great minds, of partial indulgence
> To their benumbed wills, resist the same,
> There is a law in each well-ordered nation
> To curb those raging appetites that are
> Most disobedient and refractory.
> If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,
> As it is known she is, these moral laws
> Of nature and of nations speak aloud
> To have her back returned: thus to persist
> In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,
> But makes it much more heavy. *Hector's opinion*
> *Is this in way of truth; yet ne'ertheless,*
> *My spritely brethren, I propend to you*
> *In resolution to keep Helen still,*
> *For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependance*
> *Upon our joint and several dignities.*[1]

Even more characteristic is the scene in which Ulysses, with a view to stinging the over-proud Achilles into action, makes the Greek leaders pass disdainfully before his tent, as though his help were unnecessary to them. Ulysses shows Achilles the absolute necessity for great

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, Act ii. Sc. 2.

men to keep themselves before the eyes of the world, if they would not be neglected and forgotten:—

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,
> A great-sized monster of ingratitudes:
> Those scraps are good deeds past; which are devoured
> As fast as they are made, forgot as soon
> As done: perseverance, dear my lord,
> Keeps honour bright: to have done is to hang
> Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail
> In monumental mockery. Take the instant way;
> For honour travels in a strait so narrow,
> Where one but goes abreast: keep then the path;
> For emulation hath a thousand sons
> That one by one pursue: if you give way,
> Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,
> Like to an entered tide, they all rush by
> And leave you hindmost;
> Or, like a gallant horse fall'n in first rank,
> Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,
> O'er-run and trampled on: then what they do in present,
> Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop yours;
> For time is like a fashionable host
> That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand,
> And with his arms outstretched, as he would fly,
> Grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles,
> And farewell goes out sighing. O, let not virtue seek
> Remuneration for the thing it was;
> For beauty, wit,
> High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
> *Love, friendship, charity*, are subjects all
> To envious and calumniating time.
> One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,
> That all with one consent praise new-born gawds,
> Though they are made and moulded of things past,
> And give to dust that is a little gilt
> More laud than gilt o'er-dusted.
> The present eye praises the present object.
> *Then marvel not, thou great and complete man,*
> That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;
> Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
> Than what not stirs. The cry went once on thee,
> And still it might, and yet it may again,
> If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive
> And case thy reputation in thy tent.[1]

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, Act iii. Sc. 3.

This speech seems to me to throw much light on an extremely obscure passage in *Coriolanus*, a play which must have been produced within a year or two after *Troilus and Cressida* :—

> Our virtues
> Lie in the interpretation of the time:
> And power, unto itself most commendable,
> Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
> To extol what it hath done.[1]

Coriolanus is a judgment dramatically expressed on the value of Honour as a principle of life. Honour, Shakespeare seems to have held, is not the mere abstract idea of self-esteem that dazzles the imagination of men like Hotspur. It has an external side. The *Onore* of the Italians, the external position assigned to men of distinction by the opinion of the world, stands for much, because it is a pledge to the mind that it is what it conceives itself to be. Hence when men spoke evil of him, Shakespeare, in the bitterness of his heart, gave utterance to an extreme sentiment that his judgment did not really approve: "Tis better to be vile than vile esteemed." But he judged rightly that a man's opinion of himself is not sufficient. If it be true, as Ulysses says in *Troilus and Cressida*,

> That no man is the lord of any thing,
> Though in and of him there be much consisting,
> Till he communicate his parts to others;
> Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
> Till he behold them formed in the applause
> Where they're extended——,[2]

then Coriolanus was wrong in refusing to go through the form of submitting his Honour to the judgment of the inferiors whom he disdained. His excessive pride—the same pride which Ulysses philosophically rebukes in

[1] *Coriolanus*, Act iv. Sc. 7. If this passage is not corrupt it should mean: "Our virtues depend on the opinion of our contemporaries. Even genius, however just may be the high opinion a man conceives of himself, cannot survive by its own inward force, and its most lasting monument, when it is dead, is the chair of office in which it externally displayed its power."

[2] *Troilus and Cressida*, Act iii. Sc. 3.

Achilles—is in part the cause of his unnatural enmity to his country, and of his tragic death. That, however, does not excuse the ingratitude of the people to him for the great services he had done the state, and in *Coriolanus* the fickle, wavering, unreasoning judgment of the crowd is exposed with even more severity than in *Julius Cæsar*. They are awed for the moment by the greatness of Coriolanus, as in the other play by the character of Brutus; but when the Tribunes show them what arguments they might have used against him, they become angry with themselves and with the man they have honoured, because he has treated them with disrespect.

Public and private ingratitude is also the subject of *Timon of Athens*, a tragedy first printed in the folio of 1623, but written apparently about the same time as *Coriolanus* and founded on the story of Timon, as told shortly in Plutarch's *Life of Antony* and in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, Novel 28: "Of the strange and beastlie nature of Timon of Athens, enemie to mankind, with his death, buriale and epitaphe." This play has very little action It is a compound of the motives of *Coriolanus* and *King Lear*, the banished Alcibiades, who returns to take vengeance on his native city, being a pale reflection of the Roman hero, and Timon a less interesting variation of the British king. The different scenes are illustrations of the text: "The devil knew not what he did when he made man politic: he crossed himself by't: and I cannot think but, in the end, the villanies of man will set him clear."[1] Extraordinary observation and invention are shown in representing the various moods of baseness with which men fawn upon those who are in prosperity, and forsake them when their fortunes change; and there is admirable skill in the contrast between the abstract professional misanthropy of Apemantus and the misanthropy of Timon, arising out of personal experience. But on the whole the character of Timon compares unfavourably with that of Lear, and the play suffers morally from the fact that Timon, in his violent invectives, seems to ascribe

[1] *Timon of Athens*, Act iii Sc. 3.

all his misery to mankind, without recognising, like Lear, that much of it is due to his own want of judgment and discrimination. On the other hand, if it be regarded as a piece of dramatic autobiography, the tragedy has much interest.

Of *Antony and Cleopatra*, first published in the folio of 1623, I need not speak in detail, because, for my historical purpose, I have already pointed out its evident connection with the current of thought in the Sonnets. The tragedy represents

> The triple pillar of the world transformed
> Into a strumpet's fool;

and the various episodes which make up the action follow very closely the story of Antony's life as told by Plutarch. Antony's character in its extraordinary versatility—orator, soldier and debauchee; a Henry V. without his power of self-control—furnished one of those contradictory problems of human nature which Shakespeare was accustomed to study with the most sympathetic insight; and the meretricious fascination of Cleopatra, as recorded by Plutarch, joined (for she is no Cressida) to a certain greatness of soul and fidelity of passion, must have struck the poet's imagination by its likeness, as well as its contrast, to some woman whose character he painted in his Sonnets. The use of the word "will" in this remarkable play is noticeable. When Antony has left the battle of Actium, to his own dishonour, in pursuit of the flying Cleopatra, the queen asks the shrewd, worldly, and calculating Enobarbus, who is introduced into the play as a kind of chorus to comment on Antony and his fortunes:—

> Is Antony or we in fault for this?

Enobarbus replies:—

> Antony only, that would make his will
> Lord of his reason.[1]

Yet Antony throughout the play recognises that he is

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iii. Sc. 13.

acting against his deliberate resolution, under the irresistible influence of passion :—

> I followed that I blush to look upon :
> My very hairs do mutiny ; for the white
> Reprove the brown for rashness, and they them
> For fear and doting [1]

So that his conduct is what Iago calls "merely a lust of the blood and *permission* of the will." [2] This is the very helplessness of passion spoken of in Sonnet cl. :—

> O, from what power hast thou this powerful might
> With insufficiency my heart to sway ?
> To make me give the lie to my true sight
> And swear that brightness doth not grace the day ?
> Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
> That in the very refuse of thy deeds
> There is such strength and warrantise of skill
> That, in my mind, thy worst all best exceeds ?

A very few words will suffice for the one remaining tragedy ascribed to Shakespeare, *Henry VIII.* If it had not been that this play was included without question by Heminge and Condell in the folio of 1623, I should never have supposed it possible that it could be taken for the work of Shakespeare. In point of conception, treatment, and versification, it stands apart, not only from the group of histories written by Shakespeare before 1600, but also from the series of tragedies we have just been considering. Whoever wrote it, it was certainly composed when the hendecasyllabic blank verse, introduced by Beaumont and Fletcher, had become fashionable in the theatre, and, at so late a date, players like Heminge and Condell ought to have been sure as to the authorship. I should be, therefore, slow to reject it, as not being the production of Shakespeare, nor do I think that Gifford has shown any good reason for distinguishing it from the drama of the name, which is recorded to have been acted in 1613, when the Globe theatre was burned down through an accident occasioned by the firing of cannon in the course of the performance. If, however, it be Shakespeare's, I

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iii. Sc. 11. [2] *Othello*, Act i. Sc. 3.

can only account for its dissimilarity to his other plays by supposing it to have been written to order after he had practically quitted the stage. It is clear, from the final christening scene and the prophecy of Cranmer, that a compliment was designed in it to James I., while, in other respects, the drama seems intended by its structure to gratify the taste for pageants which was encouraged by the Queen. Whether Shakespeare was recalled from his retirement to compose the play for a particular occasion, whether he wrote it as a *tour de force* to show that he could successfully adapt himself to the dramatic taste of the time, or whether (which on the whole I should think most probable, for the obscurely metaphorical style often resembles his latest manner) he wrote a portion of the play, and gave the whole the prestige of his name, in any case, *King Henry VIII.* breaks away completely from the poet's old method of dramatic composition. It is written with a constant eye to stage effect, but without any central poetical idea such as animates even *King Henry VI.*, so that it is made up of a succession of episodes rather than of a series of connected actions. The scenes of the arrest and sentence of Buckingham, the trial of Queen Katharine, the fall of Wolsey, the coronation of Anne Bullen, and the christening of Elizabeth, might, any or all of them, have been removed without affecting the organic structure of the drama; while the best known passages, such as the two famous speeches of Wolsey to Cromwell, and those of Katharine in the fourth Act, are purple patches, effective for stage recitation, but not remarkable for depth of thought or feeling. A drama composed on these mechanical lines need not be considered in the history of Shakespeare's art.

CHAPTER VII

A SURVEY OF SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT

IN the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made to trace chronologically and in detail the successive stages of Shakespeare's dramatic progress Now that I have completed the inquiry it may be convenient to sum up briefly the general result as far as it throws light on the structure, characterisation, and style of his plays.

The first group of Shakespeare's plays includes *Titus Andronicus*, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, the Second and Third Parts of *King Henry VI.* (in their old form of *The Contention of the Houses of York and Lancaster*, and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York*), and *Richard III.* With these tragedies is to be ranked chronologically *The Taming of A Shrew.* In all the plays just mentioned the influence of Marlowe, as a poet, and of Machiavelli, as a philosopher, is unmistakable; and this is especially the case in *Titus Andronicus.* The action represented involves a striking display of the egotistic passions, and the interest turns on the fixity of purpose with which the different *dramatis personæ* pursue their several objects. Shakespeare, however, is far superior to Marlowe in the power of conceiving an action as a whole, and in his early historical tragedies he represents, not so much the victorious progress of a single conqueror like Tamburlaine, as the collision of a number of powerful wills engaged in a fierce struggle for supremacy.

The structure of these early tragedies is comparatively simple, and, as in Marlowe's plays, the epic principle predominates. But as Shakespeare takes the trouble to conceive in his imagination how the historical struggle he represents would really have proceeded, the progress of the action in *King Henry VI.* is far more complicated and probable than is the case in *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II.*; and though he follows closely the order of events as related by Holinshed, he arranges them with a just view to stage effect. In the same way as regards character, Shakespeare's leading *dramatis personæ*, being arbitrarily evolved out of an abstract idea of *virtù*, have, like Marlowe's, a melodramatic air: Aaron and Richard III. in this respect resemble Barabas, Tamburlaine, and Guise. But the power of conscience, as well as of the will, is illustrated in the character of Richard III., and the delusion of self-love in the person of Cade. Marlowe, on the other hand, can only conceive one type of character.

The idea of energy and resolution, characteristic not only of the school of Marlowe but of the temper of the audience in the early Elizabethan theatre, is vividly reflected in the style of *Titus Andronicus*. The Nyms and Pistols, who then abounded in the pit, loved to hear the actor "bombast out a blank verse," and we know from the testimony of contemporaries that, in the judgment of such critics, *Titus Andronicus* was the model of a play. They doubtless listened with delight to the following speech of Aaron when he saves his infant son from being killed by Demetrius and Chiron:—

> Stay, murderous villains! will you kill your brother?
> Now, by the burning tapers of the sky,
> That shone so brightly when this boy was got,
> He dies upon my scimitar's sharp point
> That touches this my first-born son and heir!
> I tell you, younglings, not Enceladus,
> With all his threatening band of Typhon's brood,
> Nor great Alcides, nor the god of war,
> Shall seize this prey out of his father's hands.
> What, what, ye sanguine, shallow-hearted boys!

> Ye white-limed walls! ye alehouse painted signs!
> Coal-black is better than another hue,
> In that it scorns to bear another hue;
> For all the water in the ocean
> Can never turn the swan's black legs to white,
> *Although she lave them hourly in the flood.*[1]

We next come to a group of dramas composed, as may be reasonably conjectured, between the years 1594-97, and consisting of *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and (probably) the first version of *The Tempest*, which may have appeared under the title *Love's Labour's Won* about 1596. In most of these plays men and things are represented in a comic aspect, but tragedy appears in portions of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and in the whole story of *Romeo and Juliet*. Whether the action of the play, however, be tragic or comic, the fundamental motive seems to be diametrically opposed to that which prevails in the group of early tragedies and histories. The will of man is no longer seen struggling, more or less victoriously, towards a proposed end; man and his actions are rather contemplated as the sport and plaything of some external power, and the general impression left on the mind is the vanity and impotence of mortal things. Laughter is raised by all kinds of incongruity, mistake, miscalculation, brought about, sometimes by a freak of nature, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, sometimes by the blunders of human stupidity, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, sometimes by magic or elvish intervention, as in *The Tempest* and *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, finally, misfortune is produced by the power of Love, as in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The poet seems to contemplate life from a point of observation, rather than to sympathise with any defined principle of action. The keynote of his thought in all this group of plays is the same as that originally struck in the Induction to *The Taming of a Shrew*: it is intimately connected with the Catholic doctrine, "vanity of vanities," enforced as the moral of the old story from

[1] *Titus Andronicus*, Act iv. Sc. 2.

which the idea of that Induction is borrowed. Composed while Shakespeare was still under the influence of Mar lowe, *The Taming of A Shrew* shows at what an early date the idea of the mingled tragedy and comedy of human life began to form itself in his imagination.

In the structure of the early comedies, which I have called Comedies of Illusion, the influence of Lyly is no less evident than is the influence of Marlowe in the composition of the early tragedies. The atmosphere of dream and fancy, the introduction of the underplot, the sustained combats of verbal wit in the dialogue, all derive their origin from the author of *Euphues* and his Court comedies; but just as Shakespeare has contributed an element of his own to the Machiavellian principle in Marlowe's tragic manner, so in his comedies he has appropriated the euphuistic style with an inventive skill that leaves the features of its first parent barely recognisable. Of character, as a motive of action, there is, as might be expected in these plays, little trace. In them men are represented rather as being moved by external forces than by their own wills. Bottom is almost the only character in the Comedies of Illusion indicating in the poet a subtle conception of human nature. Faint outlines, however, of ideas afterwards elaborately executed appear in the Biron and Rosalind of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the originals of Benedick and Beatrice; while in the blunders of Dull and Costard are anticipated the inimitable humours of Dogberry and Verges.

As regards language and versification these plays exhibit a great variety of styles. Traces remain in them of the jolting irregular metres of the Morality;[1] the rhyming couplets of ten syllables, used by Peele in *The Arraignment of Paris*, are revived in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream:* the bombastic diction of Marlowe has almost entirely disappeared, but the regular simplicity of his blank verse is preserved in beautiful combinations of metrical harmony, expressive of the fanciful thought and

[1] See *Comedy of Errors*, Act iii. Sc. 1: and *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act iv. Sc. 1.

feeling by which the poet is inspired. The following example from *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* may be taken as representing the genius of this group of plays:—

LYSANDER. *Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,*
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
But, either it was different in blood,—
HERMIA. O cross! too high to be enthralled to low,
LYS. Or else misgraffed in respect of years,—
HER. O spite! too old to be engaged to young.
LYS. Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,—
HER. O hell! to choose love by another's eyes.
LYS. Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,
War, death or sickness did lay siege to it,
Making it momentany as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream;
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,
And ere a man hath power to say "Behold!"
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.[1]

In spite of the apparently fundamental conflict between Shakespeare's tragic and his comic view of life, between the Machiavellian principle, illustrated in his early tragedies, and the Catholic sentiment, *underlying his* Comedies of Illusion, both elements are combined and reconciled in the group of plays produced between 1596 and 1600. These include the chronicle histories of *Richard II.*, *Henry IV.*, and *Henry V.*; the tragi-comedies, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado about Nothing*; and the comedies *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare himself seems to have now attained an inward state of ease and serenity, and this is reflected in the perfect harmony, the complete equilibrium of his art. He maintains in his work an admirable balance between the principles of action and reflection. The Catholic doctrine of the vanity of the world still exerts a powerful influence on his thought, finding expression in such speeches as "All the world's a stage," and "What art thou, thou

[1] *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act i. Sc. 1.

idol, Ceremony?" but the Puck-like love of mischief, illustrated in the words

> And those things do most please me
> That befall preposterously,

and inspiring the earlier comedies, is now mitigated with compassion: while the poet contemplates the actions of his *dramatis personæ* with the calm of a philosopher, he feels for them with the heart of a man. There is in these plays no sign of those terrible internal conflicts of conscience which break out in his late tragedies; a spirit of serene humanity elevates his conceptions of character. Interesting us in the imaginary action for its own sake, he finds means at the same time to point out its moral significance. Whether he represents opposing views of honour as a motive of conduct, in the persons of Hotspur, Prince Henry, or Falstaff; the profound mixture of resolution and reflection in the character of Henry V.; the conflicting claims of justice and mercy, advocated on the one side by Shylock, on the other by Portia; the contrast between court and country life delightfully idealised in *As You Like It;* the happy blunders diverting the action from tragedy to comedy in *Much Ado about Nothing;* the incomparable mixture of pathos and absurdity in *Twelfth Night,*—in all these wonderful creations we are struck by the complete suppression of the poet's personality, by the soundness of his philosophy, by the sublime serenity of his art.

An increased power of dramatic conception is accompanied by a corresponding advance in the art of structural arrangement, representation of character, diction and versification. The structure of all the plays produced during this period is admirable. Already in his early Histories, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* and in *Romeo and Juliet,* Shakespeare had shown himself to be instinctively aware that the drama is only a higher and more vivid rendering of the form of ideal action contained in the epic, and he had founded the plots of his plays on chronicles or tales familiar to the imagina-

tion of the people. But the group of histories, comedies, and tragi-comedies written between 1597 and 1600 exhibits that complexity of workmanship and variety of resource which is the sign of the highest art. In *The Merchant of Venice* three separate *fabliaux* are blended in one action in such a manner as to create a perfectly natural situation, and to give a new complexion to the incidents of the original story. Tragedy and comedy are harmonised by combining the principle of the *roman* with that of the *fabliau;* the tales of Italy supply the framework of the play; the romances of Spain its complication and pathos.

The underplot is now so artfully connected with the main action that, whereas in *The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost,* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* the euphuistic combat of wit is introduced in separate episodes too plainly for the amusement of the audience, the intervention of the characters of low life in *Much Ado about Nothing* serves to develop the plot; while in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* the appearance of the Fool, metamorphosed from the Vice of the Morality, gives ironic point to the passages of philosophical reflection.

Again the lyric element is now completely fused with the dramatic. In the Comedies of Illusion fancy plays with such uncontrolled freedom that we seem scarcely in touch with the world of reality. On the other hand an atmosphere of humanity and society pervades the entire action of *The Merchant of Venice, Much Ado about Nothing, As You Like It,* and *Twelfth Night* Yet so far from there being any failure in the lyric vein that prevails in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* and *The Tempest,* we find in the later plays passages of such transcendent beauty as the garden scene at Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice;* the soliloquies of King Henry V. in his capacity both of Prince of Wales and of King; the speeches of Jaques in *As You Like It;* and the scene between Viola and the Duke, beginning "Give me some music," in *Twelfth Night.*

A similar balance and complexity of thought is displayed in the representation of character. We are

placed in situations which enable us to observe with advantage the operations of contrary instincts in the souls of men. The principle of *virtù* is shown in its proper relation and proportion to other qualities. Egotistic resolution is, as in the case of Shylock, either opposed by the law of religion and humanity, or contrasted with unselfishness like that of Antonio. In Henry V. *virtù* is exalted into kingly heroism, modified only by an inclination to reflective irony. Honour works diversely in characters so differently composed as Hotspur and Falstaff. Love overcomes the mocking spirit of Benedick; philosophic reflection springs out of the libertine experience of Jaques; the absurd disproportion in the ideas of self-love is illustrated in the persons of Dogberry and Malvolio.

Nothing is more significant of Shakespeare's advance in art than his growing skill in the portraiture of women. While he was writing in the vein of Marlowe or Lyly, it was not to be expected that his heroines should present marked features. Melodramatic creatures of lust and revenge like Tamora; viragoes like Margaret of Anjou; lay figures such as Hermia or Helena; beautiful fancies such as Miranda; shrews of the type of Adriana or Kate,—characters of this stamp scarcely serve to discriminate the feminine from the masculine sex, except when (as illustrated in *The Taming of the Shrew*) they exhibit the inferiority of the former in strength of will. On coming to the period of the Romantic Comedies and Tragi-Comedies all is changed. The female personages of these plays present in a highly-developed form the wit of the woman of the Italian *fabliau* joined to the sentiment of the woman of the Spanish romance. No longer overpowered by man, as in the earlier tragedies, or fading into shadowy outline, as in the Comedies of Illusion, woman now takes a leading part, through her mother wit and readiness of invention, in the evolution of the action, making up by the flexibility of her mind and the delicacy of her perception for her lack of physical force. To this dramatic period belong Portia, most delightful of Shakespeare's women, sound of instinct, honourable in principle, clear of

head, and warm of heart; Rosalind, skilful in disguising the depth of her passion beneath the brilliancy of her wit; Beatrice, with a temper, apparently hard and bright as a diamond, yet capable of loyal friendship, brought into subjection to love; Maria, the shrewd waiting-woman, who tricks Malvolio; Viola, most beautiful example in poetry of female self-sacrifice.

As regards language and versification, the appearance of a more figurative and metaphysical diction marks the beginning of a new dramatic manner in the plays of this period, while the frequent use of rhyme links the versification to that of the preceding group. Both features are exemplified in *Richard II.*, the earliest of the later histories:—

GAUNT. All places that the eye of heaven visits
Are to a wise man ports and happy havens.
Teach thy necessity to reason thus;
There is no virtue like necessity.
Think not the king did banish thee,
But thou the king. Woe doth the heavier sit,
Where it perceives it is but faintly borne.
Go, say I sent thee forth to purchase honour,
And not the king exiled thee; or suppose
Devouring pestilence hangs in our air,
And thou art flying to a fresher clime:
Look, what thy soul holds dear, imagine it
To lie what way thou go'st, not whence thou comest;
Suppose the singing birds musicians,
The grass whereon thou tread'st the presence strewed,
The flowers fair ladies, and thy steps no more
Than a delightful measure or a dance;
For gnarling sorrow hath less power to bite
The man that mocks at it and sets it light.

BOLINGBROKE. O, who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
Or wallow naked in December snow
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?
O, no! the apprehension of the good
Gives but the greater feeling to the worse:
Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
Than when he bites, but lanceth not the sore[1]

[1] *Richard II.*, Act i. Sc. 3

Here, it will be observed, there are comparatively few eleven-syllable lines, and the pause generally occurs at the end, and not in the middle, of the verse. But, towards the close of this middle period of history and romantic comedy and tragi-comedy, a new metrical style comes into use, a good specimen of which—as it recalls in some respects the manner of the preceding group—is found in the following speech of Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* :—

> This is the air; that is the glorious sun;
> This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't;
> And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
> Yet 'tis not madness. Where's Antonio, then?
> I could not find him at the Elephant:
> Yet there he was; and there I found this credit,
> That he did range the town to seek me out.
> His counsel now might do me golden service;
> For though my soul disputes well with my sense,
> That this may be some error, but no madness,
> Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
> So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
> That I am ready to distrust mine eyes
> And wrangle with the reason that persuades me
> To any other trust but that I am mad,
> Or else the lady's mad; yet, if 'twere so,
> She could not sway her house, command her followers,
> Take and give back affairs and their dispatch
> With such a smooth, discreet, and stable bearing
> As I perceive she does: there's something in't
> That is deceiveable.[1]

If the elaborate structure of the diction and the metrical sentences in this speech be compared with the simple rhythm of any parallel passage in *The Comedy of Errors*, it will at once be seen how vastly Shakespeare, by employing his genius on the development of romance, had added to his poetical resources.

Thus, in all the work of Shakespeare between 1596 and 1600, the conflicting elements of art are so blended and balanced that nothing mars the total effect of ideal nature, and the personal voice of the poet is indis-

[1] *Twelfth Night*, Act iv. Sc. 3.

tinguishable from the voice of his dramatic offspring. But after the latter date there is a great change in the spirit of his composition. Among the plays next produced are *Hamlet, Othello, All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Macbeth, King Lear, Pericles, Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. In all of these the tragic element vastly predominates over the comic; where comedy is introduced it is apt to be bitter, sarcastic, and sometimes even repulsive. Moreover, the tragedy lies rather in character than in action; as the titles of most of the plays show, the interest turns not so much on the evolution of a plot reflecting the general course of human affairs, as in a situation involving the misfortunes of a particular person. And lastly, in the feelings and utterances of these leading persons, we seem to hear unmistakably the voice of the poet himself. Can it be doubted that, in the philosophic speculation of Hamlet, Shakespeare is expressing his own ideas; that he has himself felt the passionate jealousy represented in Othello, Posthumus, and Leontes; that the agony of mental conflict in Angelo reflects the experience of his creator; that something more than the abstract imagination of the "hack playwright" inspires the imprecations of Lear? The tragic view of life, presented alike in the spectacle of the mad king, and in Hamlet's soliloquies, is identical with the lyrical cry of the author of the Sonnet beginning:—

> Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.[1]

Yet this intrusion of the poet's personality does not overthrow the just balance of his art or his moral judgment. As before, he continues to ground his plays on well-known tales and legends, and to choose for representation actions which will be readily apprehended by the spectators. The personal element no doubt affects the structure of the play. Soliloquies increase in number. As the interest lies more in character than in the progress of the plot, the *dénouement* of the play is often treated—as in *Measure for*

[1] Sonnet lxvi.

Measure and *Hamlet*—with much less care than in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. On the other hand, the management of the plot in *Macbeth* and *Othello* is admirable throughout, and in the introduction of the grave-diggers in *Hamlet* and of the Fool in *King Lear*, Shakespeare gave proof not only of consummate stage-craft but of the finest judgment. While he gratified the English love of realistic imitation and kept up the old traditions of the stage, he contrived by episodes like these to reduce to its proper tone the intense expression of personal sympathy which he threw into the speeches of his leading characters.

Nor is there any want of dramatic balance in his tragic representation of human nature. With all Shakespeare's intense feeling for individuals, he always shows them in their true relation to life and action. As Aristotle recommends, he excites interest in men of mixed character, whose deeds or misfortunes are not wholly due to themselves. We see in Hamlet and Macbeth the will suspended between conscience and desire in a manner intelligible to all human beings: Othello and Lear are in some measure the victims of the crimes of others. Yet, lest we should sympathise too strongly with Hamlet in his soliloquies, the consequences of his irresolution are clearly shown, and our judgment of his character is determined by the admiration he himself expresses for men like Fortinbras and Horatio: our compassion for Othello recoils before the fate of the pure and innocent Desdemona, the result of the Moor's consuming jealousy; while the original cause of Lear's calamities is clearly indicated in the moralising of his Fool. It is notable with what persistency and knowledge the poet treats the passion of jealousy, always representing it as a baneful force destroying the balance of the soul:

> Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmation strong
> As proofs of holy writ.

Yet he does not make us hate the characters who yield

to it. On the other hand, there is no attempt, in these late tragedies, to exhibit the principle of *virtù* melodramatically, as in the persons of Aaron and Richard III. Whatever admiration may be felt for the intellect of Iago and Edmund is lost in our detestation of their selfish cruelty, and we rejoice at the poetical justice of their punishment.

The characters of women in this group of plays are of three kinds: they are represented sometimes as the innocent victims of evil in the world; sometimes as the types of evil will or sensual passion; sometimes as the models of noble purity. To the first and largest class belong Ophelia, Desdemona, Mariana, Helen, Imogen, Hermione; to the second Lady Macbeth and Hamlet's mother; to the third Isabella and Marina. This mode of representing female character is the natural result of the change from romantic comedy or tragi-comedy to tragedy; for the witty and versatile women of the preceding group there seems to be no place in the more melancholy view of life and action which now fills the imagination of the poet.

This change of thought and feeling is expressed by a change of style. From the smooth-flowing verse characteristic of the romantic period, we pass abruptly in Shakespeare's tragedies to vehement imagery and broken interjectional sentences, suggestive of the internal anguish of the speakers. The new manner is first observable in *Hamlet*, which is one of the earliest of the tragic dramas. For example:—

> O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
> But two months dead. nay, not so much, not two:
> So excellent a king; that was, to this,
> Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother,

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing of her galled eyes,
She married.[1]

It will be noted how frequently in this passage a redundant syllable occurs after the cæsura in the middle of the line. This effect is, I think, comparatively rare in the plays of the middle period, and in the early comedies and tragedies it is hardly found at all. Equally remarkable is the savage emphasis of the rhythm in those speeches in the later plays of this group which are inspired by the passion of jealousy, as in the following of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*:—

Is there no way for men to be, but women
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards;
And that most venerable man which I
Did call my father, was I know not where
When I was stamped; some coiner with his tools
Made me a counterfeit: yet my mother seemed
The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
The nonpareil of this. O vengeance, vengeance!
Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained,
And prayed me oft forbearance; did it with
A pudency so rosy the sweet view on't
Might well have warmed old Saturn: that I thought her
As chaste as unsunned snow.

. . . .

Could I find out
The woman's part in me! For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part! be it lying, note it,

[1] *Hamlet*, Act i. Sc. 2.

> The woman's: flattering, hers: deceiving, hers:
> . . . .
> For even to vice
> They are not constant, but are changing still
> One vice, but of a minute old, for one
> Not half so old as that. I'll write against them,
> Detest them, curse them: yet, 'tis greater skill
> In a true hate to pray they have their will:
> The very devils cannot plague them better.[1]

The last group of Shakespeare's dramas has its foundation entirely in tales of Greek or Roman history, and consists of *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, most of which appeared in the years immediately preceding his retirement to Stratford. The general character of these plays is tragic: compared with their predecessors they appear to be ill-suited for performance on the stage; the action being irregular, the interest concentrated in particular persons, scenes and situations, the speeches often longer and more obscure in thought and diction than a popular audience would be inclined to tolerate. It seems as if the poet had selected famous stories of antiquity, and had thrown them into a dramatic form, for the purpose rather of embodying his own views of life than of pleasing the spectators in the theatre; hence in a later generation Dryden, who felt the poetical greatness of *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, took the trouble to re-cast them in accordance with the dramatic taste of his age. Certain dominant motives constantly reappear under different forms throughout this group of plays. By the nature of the action or by the moralising of individual speakers, the poet represents the fickleness, treachery, and unreason of mankind acting *en masse*, as in the Crowd of *Julius Cæsar* and *Coriolanus*; the worship of success and wealth exemplified in the flattering friends of Timon; the studied art of the popular orator illustrated in

[1] *Cymbeline*, Act ii. Sc. 4.

Mark Antony and the tribunes in *Coriolanus;* and on the other hand the contempt of individuals for public opinion, as expressed in the invectives of Flavius and Marullus in *Julius Cæsar*, of Menenius in *Coriolanus*, or in the imprecations of Timon after his ruin. He dwells also on the relations and duties of the individual to society; setting forth in Brutus the idea of honour as a motive of action; warning men of great mind, by the example of Timon, of the consequences of excess in liberality, and, by the fate of Coriolanus, of the end of excessive pride; and pointing out, in the conversation between Achilles and Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, the dangers of heroic self-esteem. The conflict between public duty and private inclination is represented with special force in the history and character of Antony, whose temper, wavering between passion and honour, seems to have been conceived in Shakespeare's imagination with all the vividness of personal sympathy. Equal insight is shown in the elaborate mixture of treachery, fascination, and caprice, manifested in the characters of women like Cressida and Cleopatra, the verisimilitude of which is hardly balanced, on the side of good, by the more abstract figures of Portia and Volumnia. Throughout this group of plays the spirit of reflection prevails over action; and personal experience, intensified and somewhat embittered by suffering, seems to colour the dramatic situation imagined by the poet.

The style, as in some of the Sonnets, becomes so figurative as to be often obscure. The general dialectical tendency of the thought, the metaphorical flights of the diction, and the abruptness of the rhythmical movement, characteristic of this period of composition, are well represented in the following speech of Troilus, which may be taken to express Shakespeare's own view, formed in the fulness of worldly wisdom, of the value of honour as a motive of conduct, even in a cause morally bad:—

I take to-day a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will;

My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,
Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores
Of will and judgment: how may I avoid,
Although my will distaste what it elected,
The wife I chose? there can be no evasion
To blench from this and to stand firm by honour:
We turn not back the silks upon the merchant
When we have soiled them, nor the remainder viands
We do not throw in unrespective sieve,
Because we now are full. It was thought meet
Paris should do some vengeance on the Greeks:
Your breath of full consent bellied his sails;
The seas and winds, old wranglers, took a truce
And did him service: he touched the ports desired,
And for an old aunt, whom the Greeks held captive,
He brought a Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness
Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes stale the morning.
Why keep we her? the Grecians keep our aunt.
Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,
Whose price hath launched above a thousand ships,
And turned crowned kings to merchants.
If you'll avouch 'twas wisdom Paris went—
As you must needs, for you all cried "Go, go,"—
If you'll confess he brought home noble prize—
As you must needs, for you all clapped your hands,
And cried "Inestimable!"—why do you now
The issue of your proper wisdoms rate,
And do a deed that fortune never did,
Beggar the estimation which you prized
Richer than sea and land? O, theft most base,
That we have stolen what we do fear to keep!
But, thieves, unworthy of a thing so stol'n,
That in their country did them that disgrace
We fear to warrant in our native place![1]

I have endeavoured to place before the reader without exaggeration the evidence with which the historian has to deal in interpreting the genius of Shakespeare. About the facts themselves there is little room for dispute. Except in the case of a few plays, scholars are in a substantial agreement as to the approximate dates at which the different dramas were produced. Nor can it, I think, be denied that, if the plays be examined in their chronological order, they fall into distinct groups, exhibiting an ever expanding view of the constitution of nature, man,

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, Act ii. Sc. 2

and society, and a corresponding change in the form of dramatic expression. Of the influence of Marlowe and Lyly on the early work of Shakespeare there are abundant traces; and the impersonal equable style of the work of the middle period stands in unmistakable contrast with the emotional sympathy and the passionate forms of diction and versification that characterise all the dramas written after the year 1600.

The causes of these remarkable phenomena must remain a matter of inference, and as far as the personality of Shakespeare is involved, a mystery. No letter, no record of friends, scarcely a tradition, survives to explain how so vast a genius developed itself at this particular time and out of such humble surroundings; and all the industry and research of many generations of critics have discovered of the life of Shakespeare little of importance beyond what was known to his first biographer in the eighteenth century. Our idea of his character must be derived almost entirely from his work, and in my opinion the strongly lyrical spirit permeating all his latest plays, and particularly those written about the time of the publication of the Sonnets (when his popularity as a dramatist was probably on the decline before the growing taste for the plays of Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher), gives colour to the opinion of those who hold that the Sonnets are the product of emotions caused by actual and tragic personal experiences.

This view, however, is one that mainly interests the biographer. For the historian the study of Shakespeare's work in chronological order serves to explain the reason of the place universally assigned to him in the judgment of mankind as the greatest of dramatic poets. Other dramatists, like Æschylus, may have risen to more transcendent heights of lyric sublimity; others, like Sophocles, may surpass him in the majestic serenity and perfection of dramatic structure; but none can compare with him in the breadth of his imaginative sympathy, in the depth of his insight into the springs of human action, in his knowledge of man's relation to the world in all its aspects,

moral, religious, social, and political, in his power of embodying in an ideal form the operation of universal passions. His thought embraces at once the elemental simplicity of Homer and the civil refinement of Dante; and there is no nation, no language, of Europe, in which the speculations of Hamlet and the sufferings of Lear are not found as interesting to-day as when they were first represented on the English stage.

Moreover, the historical examination of Shakespeare's plays explains why they were necessarily the product of the English mind, and of a particular period in the life of the English nation. It was the aim of Shakespeare not only "to hold the mirror up to nature," but to show "the age and body of the time his form and pressure"; his poetical design was at once universal and particular. Two causes external to himself made his dramas possible: the state of English society as contrasted with that of other nations in Europe, and the continuity of tradition on the English stage. England alone presented such social conditions at the close of the sixteenth century as allowed all the great contemporary tendencies of human action to be reflected in the drama. She alone, while preserving the catholic and feudal foundations of society, had given full play to the new impulses of life derived, on the one side, from the Renaissance in Italy, on the other from the Reformation in Germany. Like France and Spain she had developed her institutions round the central principle of Monarchy; but, while she had encouraged every form of enterprise both in speculation and action, she had not obliterated the old traditions of honour and chivalry. Nowhere else could the dramatist find such matter for stirring political situations as in the chronicle histories of England since the reign of King John; nowhere else could he study with equal advantage the effects produced on the lives of men by the contending forces of materialism and religion, or watch so well the struggles of sensuality and ambition, checked by conscience on the one hand and the sense of vanity on the other.

Yet even the genius of Shakespeare might have failed to invent a form of dramatic expression adequate to represent this elemental conflict of principles, if a certain framework had not been supplied to his imagination by the traditions of the English drama, and by the experiments of his immediate predecessors. Unlike the stage in France and Germany, the English drama, from the fourteenth century onwards, had never ceased to modify its structure in conformity with the changing conditions of the time. The Miracle Play had quite naturally transformed itself into the Morality, and the Morality again had reflected with fidelity the gradual revolution of religious faith in the mind and imagination of the people. But it was not capable of expansion beyond a certain point. Marlowe, with daring originality, took advantage of a wide-spread lyrical enthusiasm in the temper of the nation to represent upon the English stage ideas of action based exclusively on the principles of Machiavelli; but these, as being inconsistent with the whole character of English society, could not be approved by its mature judgment. Shakespeare, working from the base suggested to him by Marlowe, and possessing the lyrical genius of that poet in a tenfold degree, combined, by a supreme effort of invention, the romantic enterprise of the new school with the religious and moral principles of the ancient stage, thus reaching that perfection of art, defined by Sir Joshua Reynolds—"an assemblage of contrary qualities mixed in such proportion that no one part is found to counteract the others."

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRAMATIC TASTE OF THE CITY: ROMANCE AND MORALITY: MUNDAY, HEYWOOD, DEKKER, MIDDLETON

CHARLES LAMB, in the preface to his *Specimens of the British Dramatists*, explains that his purpose in publishing his selections was first to illustrate "the manner in which our ancestors felt when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations"; and next to show "how much of Shakespeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind." His book is a delightful one, but it can scarcely be said that it attains either of the objects with which it was written. An act, a scene, or a single speech of a play, detached from its context, fails to throw the least light on the feelings with which the play as a whole was witnessed by the spectators on the stage. Still less can such "specimens" furnish a measure of the relative proportion in which the genius of Shakespeare stands to that of any of his contemporaries. On the contrary, the ecstatic and unmeasured enthusiasm of the comments appended by Lamb to his extracts has the effect of raising in the mind an idea of the colossal greatness of all the Elizabethan dramatists, which is by no means sustained when their works are examined organically.

A great drama must satisfy two conditions: it must be written in conformity with the universal laws of art, and it must reflect the characteristic taste of those for whose

gratification it was first composed. Judged by this canon the genius of Shakespeare stands in a class apart from all his contemporaries. Like them, indeed, he played his part in promoting on the stage an artistic movement which no single dramatist can be said to have originated, and I have endeavoured to point out in detail how largely the form of his plays was determined by a consideration for the taste of his audience. But he was a man so amply endowed by nature with the genius of poetry that his creations seem (though they actually are not) to be independent of time and place. The purpose of playing, as he understood it, was to hold the mirror up to nature. Possessing a profound knowledge of stage-craft, and understanding what Aristotle calls the "weakness of the spectators," his invention was, nevertheless, always employed in devising how he might turn the public taste and the traditions of the theatre to the service of fine art. Hence his plays in themselves constitute the standard of perfection, by reference to which the performances of the other dramatists of the age must be examined and judged.

None of his contemporaries, with the exception perhaps of Ben Jonson, cherished a like lofty ideal of art; to all the rest the description of "hack playwright," improperly used by Grant White of Shakespeare, may be justly applied. Men of great skill and much learning, many of them even possessed of fine genius, they were dramatists by profession, poets only in a subordinate sense. Though they imitated Nature, it was always with an eye to the conditions of the stage, and in the main hope of pleasing those upon whose favour they were immediately dependent. Since the scope of their work was strictly limited by these local and temporary considerations, it has failed to produce the same universal pleasure as Shakespeare's, being either so devoid of general interest, or so deeply tinged with the particular manners of the time, as to be uncongenial to posterity, which is mainly occupied with its own concerns. For this very reason the minor Elizabethan dramatists have a special historical interest; but if we are to value them on Lamb's principle,

as the mirrors of our ancestors' feelings, we must study them in the light of universal laws of art, and rank the works of each poet in their proper place and proportion, seating ourselves in imagination among the spectators in the Elizabethan theatre, observing the constitution and temper of the audience, noting the social changes which modified the transient fashions of the stage. In a word, while the plays of Shakespeare are the standard of art in the romantic drama, the plays of his successors measure the progress of romantic taste.

The usually round form of the English theatres,[1] built in considerable numbers in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, was probably suggested by the Old Bear Garden and Paris Garden on the south side of the Thames, which had been previously erected for the entertainments of bull and bear-baiting: indeed some of the theatres, when plays were not being performed in them, were used for these ruder amusements, and were accordingly provided with a movable stage. On the other hand, the internal arrangements of the theatre may have been to some extent adapted from the old inns, in the yards of which, before the erection of theatres, plays were frequently performed, while the spectators thronged around the stage or witnessed the spectacle from the windows and the external galleries and passages. The playhouses had no roof, but part of the stage was protected by a covering called "the heavens," sometimes, but not always, supported by pillars; behind this was the tiring house for the actors, surmounted by a tower from which announcement was made to the public outside, either by the sounding of a trumpet or the display of banners, that the performance was about to begin. Seats could be obtained in different parts of the theatre, at prices ranging from twopence or threepence up to eighteenpence. The bulk of the spectators stood in the yard or pit; the best places were the boxes looking sideways on the stage, which, in Elizabeth's time, were probably occupied by the aristocratic part of the audience: it was not till almost the end of the Queen's

[1] The Fortune seems to have been the only theatre built in a square form.

reign that we have any evidence of the presence of spectators on the stage itself. Smoking was allowed and refreshments circulated in all parts of the house.

From this arrangement it is evident that—assuming an audience with distinct ideas of their own as to what constituted dramatic life and action—the judgment of the pit would have had a preponderating weight in determining the ideas of the dramatist. Moreover, the romantic drama came into existence precisely at the period when the enthusiasm of this part of the audience, elevated above their ordinary thoughts and feelings by the consciousness of the growing greatness of their country, and of the influence which they themselves could indirectly exert in determining the course of national affairs, required to find some form of outward expression on the stage. The democratic tendency of taste in the early days of the romantic drama may be inferred from the description given by Dekker of the audience at the close of this period:—

> Sithence then the place is so free in entertainment, allowing a stool as well to the Farmer's son as to your Templar: that your stinkard has the self-same liberty to be there in his Tobacco-fumes which your sweet courtier hath: and that your Carman and Tinker claim as strong a voice in their suffrage, and sit to give judgment on the play's life and death, as well as the proudest Momus among the tribes of critic: it is fit that he whom the most tailors' bills do make room for, when he comes, should not be basely (like a viol) cased up in a corner.[1]

To the robust imagination, the *naive* enthusiasm, and the adventurous ignorance of such an audience as is here described, the masters of the early romantic drama dedicated their art; the taste of the turbulent apprentices of the city, the swaggering soldiers of fortune, returned from service in the Low Countries, the "carman and tinker," accustomed to the realistic imitation of Nature in the Moralities, is reflected in their plays. Hence the torrents of blood that flow in the tragedies of Kyd; the strong and animated representation of the passion of

[1] Dekker's *Gull's Horn Book*, 1609, chap. 6.

Revenge in *Titus Andronicus;* "the mighty line" "bombasted out" in plays like *The Battle of Alcazar*, and dear to the minds of the Nyms and Pistols who transferred the style from the boards of the theatre to the "slang" of ordinary life. So marked was the character of this early form of Romance, that the popular ideal of the Armada period continued for almost a generation to influence the art of the dramatist: "He that will swear" —says Ben Jonson in the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* —"*Jeronimo* and *Andronicus* are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant and hath stood still these five-and-twenty or thirty years."

As the performance of plays in the theatre grew into a settled form of entertainment, the simple popular idea of Romance, developed out of the experiments of Marlowe and his school, diverged into a great variety of forms, adapted to the tastes of different portions of the audience. There was, in the first place, the highest form of poetic romance, represented by the genius of Shakespeare, not limited by the range of any section of the national imagination, but grounded on what was best in the characters of all, carrying the spectators out of themselves into an ideal sphere of action, and fusing the conflicting traditions of the stage into novel and harmonious effects of art. Opposed to this was what may be called the anti-romantic taste of the more learned and critical portion of the audience, instructed in the culture of the Italian Humanists, and holding with Jonson that, as the end of the drama was the direct imitation of manners, the true form of imitation was a species of play compounded of the *Vetus Comœdia* and the English Morality. Incapable of fully appreciating either the poetic idealism of Shakespeare or the classic learning of Jonson, the London citizen cherished an idea of romance peculiar to himself, in which the love of enterprise and adventure was mixed with a sentimentalism at once generous and domestic. His conceptions of action were vaguely formed from reading the chronicles of Holinshed, patriotic

ballads, and translations of the Spanish romances of the type of *Amadis de Gaule.* With this taste for romance he blended a love of realistic imitation, always characteristic of the English middle classes, and the mixture of the two elements of prose and poetry, when expressed in a dramatic form, often produced the most incongruous effects. The city apprentice, whose imagination was familiar with tales of giants, dragons, knights-errant and distressed damsels, liked to think of himself and his class as the heroes of marvellous adventures; and the patch-work of extravagance and common-place which satisfied his taste soon became the object of ridicule to another influential class in the theatrical audience—the wits and gallants of the Court.

An excellent idea of the opposition between the currents of Court and City taste may be obtained from Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle.*[1] This play, produced in 1611, was intended to be a satire on the popular romantic plays of the English stage, in the same way as *Don Quixote* was a satire on the late Spanish romances. So well adapted was it to its purpose, that the offended citizens would not permit a second performance; and Heywood, the dramatist, whose style was the main object of its ridicule, was encouraged by the strength of the feeling in his favour to insert the following self-complacent apology as a Preface to his satirised play, *The Four Prentices of London*, first published in 1615:—

> To the Honest and High-spirited Prentises, the Readers: This labour which, though written many years since, in my infancy of judgment in this kind of poetry and my first practice, yet understanding (by what means I know not) it was in these more exquisite and refined times to come to the Press, in such a forwardness ere it came to my knowledge that it was past precaution, and then knowing withal that it comes short of that accurateness both in plot and style that these more censorious days with greater curiosity acquire, I must thus excuse: That as plays were then some fifteen or sixteen years ago it was then the Fashion.[2]

[1] It was probably almost entirely the composition of Beaumont.

[2] Heywood's *Works*, vol. ii. p. 162.

The design of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is singularly ingenious. A play of the ordinary middle-class romantic kind is on the point of being introduced to the spectators by the Prologue, who gives an indication of its civic character in his opening words:—

> From all that's near the Court, from all that's great
> Within the compass of the city walls,
> We now have brought our scene—

when he is rudely interrupted by a citizen climbing on to the stage, in imitation of the Court gallants, and protesting against the recent neglect of the taste of himself and his neighbours in the structure of the contemporary drama. The Prologue endeavours to appease him, but in vain; and he is presently joined by his wife, who insists that the only person capable of producing a play worth witnessing is their apprentice, Ralph. Though the Prologue points out to the invaders that all the preparations have been made for the performance of the drama he is introducing, nothing will serve them but that Ralph shall be allowed to act his own play at the same time, and to this arrangement, for the sake of peace, the Prologue agrees. Ralph, whose imagination has been fired by the reading of such romances as *Palmerin of England* and *The Knight of the Sun*, assumes the name of the Knight of the Burning Pestle, and turning his two fellow-apprentices into his squire and dwarf, becomes the hero on the stage of a number of marvellous adventures. Much of the humour of the play consists in the hopeless confusion between the domestic plot of the original drama and Ralph's aimless knight-errantry, whereby the two sets of actors are brought into collision in Waltham Forest. When this knot is disentangled the apprentice proceeds on his romantic course, in which, after vanquishing a barber whom he takes for a cruel giant, he wanders into Cracovia, and resists the amorous attempts of a Princess to seduce him from his Protestant faith. Returning to England, he is next seen in command of the train-bands at Mile End, and finally appears as a ghost to announce

the somewhat inglorious close of his career by a stray arrow, which has pierced his head while engaged in the military duties of a citizen. In the midst of all these adventures the domestic drama pursues its own way, and confusion is worse confounded by the comments of the citizen and his wife, who, quite incapable of distinguishing fiction from reality, introduce themselves into the action of both plays, as if they were witnessing the actual incidents of life in Cheapside or Shoreditch.

Satirical as the representation is, it reflects with perfect accuracy the confusion in the mind of a very large part of each theatrical audience in the reign of Elizabeth; and in weighing the merits of the romantic plays of the period we must take into account their artlessness. Looking at the subject in this aspect, we perceive clearly that for about twenty years after the Spanish Armada the popular taste determined the direction of dramatic art; and that this taste was divided between the two main currents of romance: plays founded on the imitation of civic manners, and melodramas of murder and revenge. The chief representatives of the former class are Munday, Heywood, Dekker and (in his early comedies) Middleton; those of the second are Tourneur and Webster; Marston and Chapman write sometimes in one manner, sometimes in the other. At the close of this period (which is also marked by the anti-romantic practice of Ben Jonson) a complete change is observable in the taste of the theatre, and the stage comes under the sway of Beaumont and Fletcher, who seek to gratify the sophisticated ideas of the Court, to the exclusion of the instinctive ideas of the people. I shall devote this and the following chapter to tracing the progress of the principle of romance in the various species of plays specially intended to please the taste of the City.

The romantic taste of the city middle-class is illustrated in its earliest and most elementary forms by the plays of Antony Munday. This man was a typical representative of the literary "hack" of the Elizabethan age. Born in 1553, he lived eighty years, and for the

greater part of his days he contrived to support himself by his pen He was the son of a linen-draper, and was apprenticed to Allde, a London stationer, in 1576. In 1578 he travelled in Italy, and in Rome gained a knowledge of the education given in the English College to his Roman Catholic countrymen—experience which he turned to profit on his return to England by writing some bitter anti-Papal pamphlets. In 1581 he gave an account of the execution of Campion, in language which Hallam declares "that no scribe of the Inquisition could have surpassed";[1] when the excitement aroused by that conspiracy had passed he endeavoured to gain his living as an actor and a playwright. Between 1584 and 1602 he produced eighteen plays, or an average of a play a year. He was also at that period a voluminous translator of romances, among which may be mentioned *Historie of Palladino of England* (1588), *Palmerin d'Oliva* (1588), *History of Palmendos* (1589), *Amadis de Gaule* (1595), *Palmerin of England* (1602). His plays were for the most part based on ballads or popular episodes in the history of England or the world, as may be inferred from their names, *John à Kent and John à Cumber* (1595), *Richard Cœur de Lion's Funeral* (1598), *Valentine and Orson* (1598), *Rising of Cardinal Wolsey* (1601), *Jephthah* (1602), *Cæsar's Fall* (1602) Meres refers to him (very ridiculously, considering Shakespeare's established reputation) in his *Palladis Tamia* as "our best plotter," a compliment which provoked Ben Jonson, in *The Case is Altered* (1599), to satirise him (doubtless in allusion to his romance *Palladino of England*, as well as his ballads) under the name of Balladino. When the romantic style in which he wrote went out of fashion, Munday supported himself by preparing, or helping to prepare, the City Pageants, being steadily engaged in this task between the years 1605 and 1623 He died in 1633.

His dramatic work exhibits the naive and simple character of the romantic play in its transition from the

[1] The language of his *Discovery of E. Campion, etc*, is borrowed by Holinshed. Hallam, *Constitutional History of England* (1854), vol. 1 p 146

epic forms of the English ballad, as illustrated in the Robin Hood cycle, and from the late Spanish romances, typified by *Amadis de Gaule.* It will be sufficient to refer to what is undoubtedly his best play, *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, produced in February 1598-99. This drama, founded on the legend of Robin Hood as recorded in many old ballads and tales, represents the manner in which that famous outlaw was forced to betake himself to the woods; the persecutions he suffered from Prince John; the passion entertained for him by Queen Elinor; and his own love for Maid Marion, otherwise Matilda, daughter of Earl Fitz-Warenne. It is preceded by an induction, in which all preliminaries are explained by the poet Skelton, who acts in the double capacity of presenter of the play and as Friar Tuck in the play itself. The actors are marshalled on the stage before the spectators, to whom Skelton explains the initial situation:—

> This youth, that leads yon virgin by the hand
> (As doth the sun the morning richly clad),
> Is our Earl Robert, or your Robin Hood,
> That in these days was Earl of Huntington.
> The ill-faced miser, bribed in either hand,
> Is Warman, once the steward of his house,
> Who, Judas-like, betrays his liberal lord
> Into the hands of that relentless prior
> Called Gilbert Hood, uncle to Huntington.
> These two, that seek to part these lovely friends,
> Are Elinor the Queen and John the Prince:
> She loves Earl Robert, he Maid Marion;
> But vainly, for their dear affect is such
> As only death can sunder their true loves.
> Long had they loved, and now it is agreed
> This day they must be troth-plight; afterward
> At Huntington's fair house a feast is held;
> But envy turns it to a house of leave,
> For those false guests, conspiring with the Prior,
> To whom Earl Robert greatly is in debt,
> Mean at the banquet to betray the Earl
> Unto a heavy writ of outlawry:
> The manner and escape you all shall see.

The play itself is a mere series of adventures, through all of which Earl Robert and his mistress pass to a fortu-

nate conclusion; but in the sequel, *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington*, the pity and terror of the spectators are aroused by the successful villainy of the Prior of York and one Doncaster, who, after murdering the repentant steward Warman, administer poison to Robin Hood. The death of the outlaw is, however, by no means the conclusion of the new play (in which Munday seems to have been helped by Chettle), for one of the other actors immediately proceeds to address to Skelton (Friar Tuck) the following appeal:—

> Nay, Friar, at the request of thy kind friend,
> Let not thy play so soon be at an end,
> Though Robin Hood be dead, his yeoman gone,
> And that thou thinkest there now remains not one
> To act another scene or two for thee,
> Yet know full well to please this company
> We mean to end Matilda's tragedy.

In Munday's dramatic style may be recognised some of the features of Greene and Peele's school, together with some remarkable differences. He exchanges the lofty bombastic diction of the earlier playwrights for a simple, natural, and almost conversational manner, suited to the taste of his audience. But, as in *The Battle of Alcazar* and *The Comic History of Alphonsus*, the structure of the play is epic rather than dramatic. In *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington*, the dramatist simply aims at making the ballad more real and distinct, by placing its persons and incidents immediately before the eyes of the spectators. The stage necessities of time and place force him to condense the sequence of events; and it is these necessities alone, and not the idea of a single action organically conceived, which bring the play to any kind of conclusion. Hence the clumsy contrivance of the Presenter is found, both by dramatists and audience, quite good enough to make the action probable to the imagination.

A considerably higher level is reached in the romantic plays of Thomas Heywood, which show the tendency inherent in the romantic movement to become at once more abstract and less poetical. Heywood stands to Shake-

speare much in the same relation as the author of *Amadis of Gaul* and his followers stand to the *trouvères*, who wrote the romances of the Round Table, or made the collection of *fabliaux* which furnished models for the tales of Boccaccio and Chaucer. While the histories of Lancelot and Tristram were in their way faithful ideal reflections of feudal manners, the late Spanish romances embodied mere extravagant dreams of heroic perfection, without relation to the realities of society. Heywood, in his plays, follows far in the track of Spanish romance, but he adapts the spirit of the Spanish novelist to the taste of an English audience.

Of the history of this playwright little is known. He seems not to have been related to John and Jasper Heywood, of whose works I have already spoken. According to his own account he was a native of Lincolnshire, and lived for some time at Cambridge, and William Cartwright, the actor, who edited his works in 1687, asserts that he was a Fellow of Peterhouse in that university—a statement which is not confirmed by any entry in the books of the College. In 1598 he was an actor in the Lord Admiral's Company, and he was also connected with the players belonging to Lord Southampton. His industry as an actor and dramatist was prodigious. He himself says that he was the sole or principal author of 220 plays, and his biographer, Kirkman, declares that he not only acted, but wrote something every day of his life. Like Munday, Dekker, and Middleton, he was employed in the production of the City Pageants, specimens of which are preserved among his works; and it is plain enough that the civic portion of the audience was that which he mainly sought to please. There seems to be no record of the date of his birth or death, but he began to write for the stage before 1600.

His plays fall into five distinct groups: (1) chronicle histories, like *Edward IV.* and *The Early Days of Elizabeth*; (2) mythologies, like *The Golden, Iron and Copper Ages*, etc.; (3) quasi-historical romances, like *The Four Prentises of London*; (4) romantic representations of real life, like *The Fair Maid of the West*, *The Fair Maid of the Ex-*

change, *The English Traveller*; (5) dramas of abstract romantic situations, like *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* and *The Woman Killed with Kindness*. In these groups I need not take any account of the second, as it has little bearing on the romantic movement as a whole. Of the first it will be sufficient to say that the motive in the poet's mind is not really historical, but romantic; instead of following Holinshed faithfully as Shakespeare did, Heywood selects such episodes from the historical period represented as will, he thinks, appeal to the sentiment of his audience. *Edward IV.*, for example, is mainly occupied with the adventures of the king in disguise, either as the wooer of Jane Shore, or as the boon companion of the tanner of Tamworth. The sympathies of the spectators are enlisted on behalf of Jane Shore, as being the wife of a citizen, and a good and benevolent woman, who only surrenders her virtue to the king because she does not know how to help herself: dramatic interest is also roused by the position of Shore, divided between his loyalty to his sovereign and his affection for his wife. In *If You know not Me You know Nobody*, the episodes of the building of the Royal Exchange and of the Spanish Armada are selected for treatment, not because they have any connection with each other, but because they are the incidents in Elizabeth's reign most interesting to the citizens of London.

The Four Prentises of London is a very characteristic play, and of peculiar historical interest from the account which Heywood himself gives of its transient popularity, and of its method of composition. It represents the adventures of Godfrey, Charles, Guy, and Eustace, the four sons of the Earl of Boulogne, who—a fact previously unknown to history—are living with their exiled father in London as apprentices, respectively, to the Haberdashers', Mercers', Goldsmiths', and Grocers' Companies. The boys enlist for the Crusades, and after being separated from each other on their journey to the Holy Land by numerous adventures, involving both love and danger, are finally reunited and raised to the

sovereignty of different kingdoms. The character of the play is explained in the Prologue by two of three critics, who are merely signified by numbers.

1. But what authority have you for your history? I am one that will believe nothing that is not in the chronicle.

2. Our authority is a manuscript, a book writ in parchment, which not being public or general in the world, we rather thought fit to exemplify unto the public censure things concealed and obscured, such as are not common with every one, than such historical tales as every one can tell by the fire in winter. Had not ye rather for novelty's sake see Jerusalem ye never saw, than London that ye see hourly?[1]

On the other hand, Heywood knew very well that in order to reconcile his audiences to romantic extravagance he must indulge their traditional love of realistic imitation. Hence he exhibited, to the great delight of the spectators, heroic virtues in domestic spheres; lovely damsels, rescued (as in *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*) from robbery and dishonour in the streets of London by valiant cripples;[2] or, in man's attire (as in *The Fair Maid of the West*), commanding vessels making private war against the Spaniards.[3] In the first portion of the latter play the Fair Barmaid—for that is her original occupation—is placed by her lover on his departure from England in charge of an inn, with a view to testing her virtue and fidelity. Tidings of her lover's death being brought to her, she fits out a ship to recover his body, and, after making havoc of the enemies of her country on the high seas, penetrates as far as the Court of Fez, where she has the happiness of finding that her Spencer is still alive. The passion which she excites in the bosom of the monarch of the country—who owns the unusual name of Mullisheg—is the cause of many thrilling adventures with which the second part of the play is entirely occupied. *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* and *The Woman Killed with Kindness* present clear-cut views of those abstract situations for which the spectators had been accustomed to look in the action of the Moralities.

[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works* (1874), vol. ii. p. 166.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 8.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 363-423.

All this indicates very distinctly the essential difference in the dramatic treatment of romance by Marlowe and Shakespeare, on the one side, and by Heywood on the other. In the plays of Heywood the lyrical spirit is completely wanting. Marlowe, the founder of the romantic drama, had made it the reflection of his own intense and vehement nature; Shakespeare had chosen for dramatic representation such tales and histories as lent themselves most readily to the expression of his deep and comprehensive philosophy. But Heywood thought mainly of translating into a dramatic form ideas of romance that he divined to be in the minds of his audience. He knew that to please them he must deal with incidents of love and adventure: he understood the kind of moral situations which would prove interesting on the stage. His plays abound in fresh, ardent and generous conceptions, and are but little disfigured by the gross indecency which prevails in the work of some of his contemporaries. But he knew of no principle of spiritual unity whereby to reduce to dramatic form his romantic materials; he could not even create, like Marlowe, a single type of character to command the interest of the audience; still less could he conceive, like Shakespeare, an ideal action logically developed through a series of causes and effects: his plots, invariably invented by himself, have no beginning, middle, or end. In *The Fair Maid of the West*, the action of which is alive with bustle and movement, a chorus is introduced at the end of the fourth Act with the following *naive* apology:—

> Our stage so lamely can express a sea,
> That we are forced by chorus to discourse
> What should have been in action.[1]

The Woman Killed with Kindness has two quite distinct abstract situations, one dealing with the idea of honour, the other with the idea of domestic virtue.

And since Heywood does not know how to organise

[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, vol. ii p 319.

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[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, vol. ii. p. 319.

separate actions into a single whole, he is of course unable to give to the persons engaged in these actions any ideal consistency. Considered separately his ideas are often excellent, as when (in *The Fair Maid of the West*) he represents the change in the character of a bully who develops into a brave man through the shame he feels at having his cowardice exposed by the heroine of the play; or as when he exhibits in *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* the changing demeanour of courtiers according as persons are in poverty or prosperity. But, viewed in relation to the action as a whole, the behaviour of Heywood's *dramatis personæ* is often improbable, and even unintelligible. In *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* a nameless sovereign exposes a worthy servant to the most abominable indignities merely for the purpose of displaying the virtuous character of his subject (with which the king himself is perfectly acquainted) to a pair of scoundrelly courtiers.[1] Sir Charles Mountford, in *The Woman Killed with Kindness*, to cancel what he considers a debt of honour to Sir Francis Acton, his enemy, places the honour of his sister at the mercy of the latter.[2] In order to lead up to the climax of the same play Mrs. Frankford, a woman, as it appears, of sense and virtue, is made to yield in a moment to the solicitations of her husband's treacherous friend;[3] while the *naive* unreality of the entire situation is sufficiently indicated by the moral with which the husband concludes the play:—

SIR FRANCIS. Brother, had you with threats and usage bad
Punished her sin, the grief of her offence
Had not with such true sorrow touched her heart.
FRANKFORD. I see it had not: therefore on her grave
Will I bestow this funeral epitaph,
Which on her marble tomb shall be engraved.
In golden letters shall these words be filled:
Here lies she whom her husband's kindness killed.[4]

As the lack of unity of action in Heywood's plays deprives the characters in them of verisimilitude, so does

[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, vol. vi. pp. 1-83.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 143-145.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. ii. pp. 110-112.
[4] *Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 157.

the want of consistency in the characters diminish the effect of their virtuous sentiments. This is a pity, for the sentiment itself is often beautiful and pathetic; witness the scene in which Captain Goodlacke, in pretended execution of his friend's dying instructions, demands back Spencer's portrait from Bess Bridges, the Fair Maid of the West:—

BESS. Are you a Christian? Have you any name
That ever good man gave you?
'Twas no saint you were called after. What's thy name?
GOODLACKE. *My name is Captain Thomas Good——*
BESS. I can see no good in thee; rase that syllable out of thy name.
GOOD. Goodlacke's my name.
BESS. I cry your mercy, sir: I now remember you;
You were my Spencer's friend; and I am sorry,
Because he loved you, I have been so harsh:
For whose sake I entreat, ere you take't hence,
I may but take my leave on't.
GOOD. *You'll return it?*
BESS. As I am chaste I will.
GOOD. For once I'll trust you.
BESS. O thou the perfect semblance of my love,
And all that's left of him, take one sweet kiss,
As my last farewell. Thou resemblest him
For whose sweet safety I was every morning
Down on my knees, and with the lark's sweet tunes
I did begin my prayers; and when sad sleep
Had charmed all eyes, when none save the bright stars
Were up and waking, I remembered thee;
But ah, all to no purpose.
GOOD. Sure, most sure, this cannot be dissembled.
BESS. To thee I have been constant in thy absence,
And when I looked upon this painted piece
Remembered thy last rules and principles;
For thee I have given alms, visited prisons,
To gentlemen and passengers lent coin,
That, if they ever had ability,
They might repay't to Spencer. yet for this,
All this and more, I cannot have so much
As this poor table, etc.[1]

The elemental pathos of Heywood's style is also well

[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, vol. ii. pp 303-304.

illustrated in the scene where Frankford sends out of his house everything reminding him of his wife:—

CRANWELL. Why do you search each room about your house
Now that you have despatched your wife away?
FRANKFORD. Oh, sir! to see that nothing may be left
That ever was my wife's. I loved her dearly;
And when I do but think of her unkindness,
My thoughts are all in hell: to avoid which torment,
I would not have a bodkin or a cuff,
A bracelet, necklace, or rebato wire,
Nor anything that ever was called hers,
Left me, by which I might remember her.
Seek round about.
NICHOLAS. 'Sblood, master, here's her lute flung in a corner.
FRANK. Her lute! Oh God! Upon this instrument
Her fingers have run quick division,
Sweeter than that which now divides our hearts:
These frets have made me pleasant, that have now
Frets of my heart-strings made. O, Master Cranwell,
Oft hath she made this melancholy wood
(Now mute and dumb for her disastrous chance)
Speak sweetly many a note, sound many a strain
To her own ravishing voice, which, being well-strung,
What pleasant strange airs have they not jointly sung!—
Post with it after her. Now nothing's left:
Of her and hers I am at once bereft.[1]

The bare and unadorned simplicity of these passages, which is characteristic of Heywood, shows the natural tendency of the romantic style, when once removed from its ideal sphere and applied to subjects of domestic life, to gravitate towards prose.

Some of the characteristics of Heywood's genius reappear in the work of a dramatist of greater power and imagination, Thomas Dekker, who was probably born between 1570 and 1580, and died some time after 1632. Dekker,—whose name is spelt with many variations Decker, Deckers, Dickers, Deker, Dekkers, Dekkar, and whose probable father is entered in the Registers of St. Giles, Cripplegate, as "Gentleman,"—was a Londoner by birth and residence, and possessed an unrivalled knowledge of the manners of the town. In the Induction to

[1] Heywood's *Dramatic Works*, vol. ii. pp. 147-148.

his *Seven Deadly Sins of London*, he addresses his native city: "O thou beautifullest daughter of two united monarchies! from thy womb received I my being; from thy breasts my nourishment."[1] For nearly forty years he gained his bread by such employment as he could obtain from stage managers and booksellers, and, like the later inhabitants of Grub Street, he was well acquainted with the inside of London prisons. Oldys says that he was in King's Bench Prison from 1613 to 1616,[2] and a letter of his own, written from that place in the latter year, shows that he was receiving charity from the generous actor, Edward Alleyn. Like many of his contemporaries he helped to produce the City Pageants. We find his name mentioned in connection with the stage in 1597, and the earliest of his surviving plays are *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600), *The Comedie of Old Fortunatus* (1600), *Satiro-Mastix* (1602), and *The Honest Whore* (1604). In later years Dekker co-operated with other dramatists, writing in company with Webster in 1607 *Westward Hoe, Northward Hoe*, and *Sir Thomas Wyatt*; with Middleton *The Roaring Girl* (1611), with Ford *The Witch of Edmonton* (circ. 1612), and with Massinger *The Virgin Martyr* (1622); but, for the purposes of our history, his first plays are much the most instructive; and of these *Satiro-Mastix* can be most conveniently considered in connection with the works of Ben Jonson.

Dekker is an admirable representative of the taste of the middle class London citizen, and in his work the spirit and many of the features of the old Morality are reproduced in a romantic form. As we have seen, the Morality was marked from the first by two characteristics, a very distinct and definite vein of ethical instruction, and a close imitation of the familiar objects of life. The latter tendency, so vividly illustrated in the ancient interlude of *Hick Scorner*,[3] culminates in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. In this comedy the humours and customs of the

[1] Dekker's *Non-Dramatic Works* (Grosart), vol. ii. p. 13.

[2] MS. note to Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691), p. 121.

[3] Vol. i. pp. 423-424.

Cobblers' Guild are represented in one of those plots of domestic romance which originated with Munday and Heywood. The interest of the action is divided between the fortunes of the high-born Lacy, who for the love of Rose, daughter of the Lord Mayor Ottley, disguises himself as a shoemaker; and those of the cobbler Ralph, who is impressed for military service in France, and has to leave his virtuous wife Jane to defend herself, like Penelope, against the solicitations of a rich suitor in London. The Earl of Lincoln, uncle of Lacy, and the Lord Mayor, Rose's father, oppose themselves to the course of true love, but their devices are frustrated, mainly by the intervention of Simon Eyre, prince of the shoemakers, and his apprentices. The simple drama works itself out by much the same standard of probability as is found in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the sphere of action being a kind of civic Arcadia, in which the *dramatis personæ* appear to "fleet the time carelessly as they did in the golden world." A certain consistency is given to the whole conception by the character of Simon Eyre, whose romantic liberality and good humour express themselves in the "King Cambyses vein" of theatrical rodomontade, with which he overwhelms his stiff-necked apprentices and his thrifty wife. Advanced first to the office of Sheriff, and thence to that of Lord Mayor, Simon catches the fancy of the king with his free and easy modes of speech, and secures the royal favour in behalf of the runaway lovers. The following extract from a dialogue between Simon Eyre and his sovereign will give an idea of the "romantic" style pervading this comedy:—

KING. Nay, I pray then, good Lord Mayor, be even as merry
As if thou wert among thy shoemakers:
It does me good to see thee in this humour.

EYRE. Saist thou me so, my sweet Dioclesian? then, humpe, prince am I none, yet am I princely born: by the lord of Ludgate, my liege, I'll be as merry as a pie.

KING. Tell me in faith, mad Eyre, how old thou art?

EYRE. My liege, a very boy, a stripling, a younker; you see not a white hair on my head, nor a gray in this beard; every hair I assure thy Majesty that sticks in this beard, Sim Eyre values as the

King of Babylon's ransom; Tamar Cham's beard was a rubbing brush to't; yet I'll have it off, and stuff tennis balls with it, to please my bully king.

KING. *But all this while I do not know thy age.*

EYRE. My liege I am six and fifty year old, yet I can cry humpe, with a sound heart for the honour of St. Hugh . . . : I am lusty still, Sim Eyre still: care and cold lodging brings white hairs, my sweet Majesty, let care vanish, cast it upon thy nobles; it will make thee look always young like Apollo, and cry humpe: prince am I none, yet am I princely born.

KING. Ha, ha, say, Cornwall, did'st thou ever see his like?

CORN. Not I, my Lord.[1]

The Comedie of Old Fortunatus is the story of an ancient German romance, converted into a Morality, and is a work of great interest, being, as I believe, the only example of an interlude inspired by the fully developed genius of the Renaissance. Like the early Moralities, it represents a conflict between abstract spiritual powers, Virtue, Vice, and Fortune, who exhibit their respective powers over the human agents in the play. Of the latter one, old Fortunatus, replaces the unregenerate Humana Natura of the primitive drama, being himself a spendthrift, at once the favourite and the fool of Fortune, who, at his request, makes him the master of an inexhaustible purse. After much experience, in the course of which he steals from the "Soudan" of Babylon a magic hat that enables him to travel in a moment to all parts of the earth, old Fortunatus passes away, leaving his two treasures to his sons Ampedo and Andelocia, with an injunction that they shall never be used separately. The sons disregard their father's wishes; and the greater part of the play is occupied with the representation of their adventures. Ampedo, the elder, typifies Virtue theorising without knowing how to employ the gifts of Fortune in action; the younger, Andelocia, uses the purse and wishing hat for the gratification of every selfish and vicious impulse. There is besides another actor, Shadow, an attendant upon the two brothers in the capacity of Fool or Clown, who plays the comic part of the Vice in the old Moralities. Both sons of course come to a bad end, and

[1] Dekker's *Dramatic Works* (1873), vol. i. p. 73.

the three Abstractions then dispute among themselves which has shown the most power. The Morality, which was played in the presence of the Queen, ends with the following outburst of servile, but characteristic, flattery :—

VIRTUE. Fortune thou'rt vanquished ; *sacred deity*,
O now pronounce who wins the victory.
And yet that sentence needs not, since alone
Your virtuous presence Vice hath overthrown
Yet, to confirm the contest on your side,
Look but on Fortunatus and his sons.
Of all the wealth those gallants did possess
Only poor Shadow is left comfortless,
Their glory's faded and their golden pride.
SHADOW. Only poor Shadow tells how poor they died.
VIRTUE. All that they had, or mortal men can have,
Sends only but a shadow from the grave.
Virtue alone still lives, and lives in you,
I am a counterfeit, you are the true ;
I am a shadow ; at your feet I fall,
Begging for these, and these, myself, and all.
All these that thus do kneel before your eyes
Are shadows like myself : dread Nymph, it lies
In you to make us substances. O do it ;
Virtue I am sure you love ; she wooes you to it.
I read a verdict in your sun-like eyes,
And this it is, Virtue the victory.
ALL. All loudly cry, Virtue the victory.
VIRTUE. Virtue the victory : for joy of this
Those self-same hymns, which you to Fortune sung,
Let them be now in Virtue's honour rung.[1]

The romantic adventures of the brothers, especially Andelocia, are imagined with much freshness and vivacity, and the action of the play is advanced by means of the narrating chorus and of dumb shows. No better illustration of the average morality and sentiment of the English people under Elizabeth can be found than in this interlude. Here, for example, is a passage vividly expressing, under the allegory of the travels of Fortunatus, the monarchical spirit of the times, which saw in the court of the strong Tudor Queen the image of England's greatness :—

[1] Dekker's *Dramatic Works* (1873), vol. i. p. 173.

ANDELOCIA. Faith, father, what pleasure have you met by walking your stations?

FORTUNATUS. What pleasure, boy? I have revelled with kings, danced with queens, dallied with ladies, worn strange attires, seen fantasticoes, conversed with humourists, been ravished with divine raptures of Doric, Lydian, and Phrygian harmonies; I have spent the day in triumphs and the night in banqueting.

ANDEL. O sure this was heavenly.

SHADOW. Methinks 'twas horrible.

ANDEL. He that would not be an Arabian Phenix to burn in these sweet fires, let him live like an owl for the world to wonder at

AMPEDO. Why, brother, are not all these vanities.

FORTUN. Vanities? Ampedo, thy soul is made of lead, too dull, too ponderous to mount up to the incomprehensible glory that travel lifts men to.

SHAD. My old master's soul is cork and feathers, and being so light doth easily mount up.

ANDEL. Sweeten mine ears, good father, with some more.

FORT. When in the warmth of mine own country's arms
We yawned like sluggards, when this small horizon
Imprisoned up my body, then mine eyes
[illegible] my boys,
[illegible]
[illegible]

SHAD. Why, sir, are there other heavens in other countries?

ANDEL. Peace, interrupt him not upon thy life.

FORT. For still in all the regions I have seen
I seemed to crowd among the muddy throng
Of the rank multitude, whose thickened breath,
Like to condensed fogs, do choke that beauty,
Which else would dwell in every kingdom's cheek.
No, I still boldly step into their courts,
For there to live is rare, O 'tis divine;
There shall you see faces angelical,
There shall you see troops of chaste goddesses,
Whose star-like eyes have proven (might they still shine)
To make night day, and day more crystalline.
Near these you shall behold great Heroës,
White headed councillors and jovial spirits,
Standing like fiery Cherubims to guard
The monarch, who in god like glory sits
In midst of these, as if this deity
Had with a look created a new world,
The standers by being the fair workmanship.

ANDEL. Oh, how my soul is rapt to a third heaven!
I'll travel sure, and live with none but kings.[1]

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[1] Dekker's *Dramatic Works*, vol. i. pp. 117 118

As *Old Fortunatus* is a romance transformed into a morality, so *The Honest Whore* is a morality presented in a romantic dress. This play shares with *The Woman Killed with Kindness* the distinction of furnishing the earliest example of those abstract and paradoxical moral situations which were afterwards more highly developed by Massinger and Ford. But in Dekker, as in Heywood, the moral element prevails over the dramatic. The startling title of the play seems to have been deliberately retained by the dramatist, in the face of objections made at the time; for a portion of the second edition has for its head-line *The Converted Courtezan*, a name which is really more descriptive of the plot. In the first part, Bellafront, the heroine, is converted from her evil life by the eloquent pleadings of Hippolito: the second part represents Bellafront defending the position she has gained against the assaults of Hippolito himself, who has fallen away from his former lofty standard of virtue. The honesty of Dekker's motive is transparent; in its own abstract sphere the moral, in the first part, is most forcibly presented by Hippolito's fidelity to the memory of the mistress whom he supposes to be dead; and, in the second, by the loyalty of Bellafront to her detestable husband, Matheo. The scene in which Bellafront, under the influence of her love for Hippolito, penetrates into his chamber in the dress of a page, is most nobly imagined, and the eloquence of its expression does the highest honour to Dekker's head and heart:—

HIPPOLITO. Hence guard the chamber: let no more come in;
One woman serves for man's damnation.
Beshrew thee, thou dost make me violate
The chastest and most sanctimonius vow
That e'er was entered in the court of heaven!
I was on meditation's spotless wings
Upon my journey thither: like a storm
Thou beat'st my ripened cogitations
Flat to the ground: and like a thief dost stand,
To steal devotion from the holy land.

BELLAFRONT. If woman were thy mother; if thy heart
Be not all marble (or if't marble be),
Let my tears soften it, to pity me:

I do beseech thee, do not thus with scorn
Destroy a woman.

HIP. Woman, I beseech thee,
Get thee some other suit; this fits thee not:
I would not grant it to a kneeling queen,
I cannot love thee, nor I must not. See,
The copy of that obligation,
Where my soul's bound in heavy penalties.[1]

BELL. She's dead you told me; she'll let fall her suit.

HIP. My vows to her fled after her to heaven.
Were thine eyes clear as mine, thou mightst behold her,
Watching upon yon battlements of stars
How I observe them · should I break my bond,
This board would rive in twain, these wooden lips
Call me most perjured villain: let it suffice
I ha' set thee in the path is't not a sign
I love thee, when with one so most most dear
I'll have thee fellows? All are fellows there.

BELL. Be greater than a king: save not a body,
But from eternal shipwreck save a soul:
If not, and that again sin's path I tread,
The grief be mine, the guilt fall on thy head.

HIP. Stay, and take physic for it: read this book;
Ask counsel of this head what's to be done:
He'll strike it dead that 'tis damnation
If you turn Turk again. oh, do it not!
Though heaven cannot allure you to do well
From doing ill let hell fright you and learn this,
The soul, whose bosom lust did never touch,
Is God's fair bride, and maiden souls are such:
The soul that, leaving Chastity's white shore,
Swims in hot sensual streams is the devil's whore[2]

So long as Dekker's abstract and romantic imagination can move in a congenial region, he exhibits high powers of conceiving and expressing character. His ideal contrasts are admirable, as the above extract shows, and, in the second part of *The Honest Whore*, equal skill is displayed in the portraits of Matheo, the selfish gambling husband of Bellafront, and her honest old father, Orlando Friscobaldo. The vast interval between Shakespeare and Dekker only makes itself apparent when we consider the poetry of the latter on its dramatic side. Dekker altogether lacked both the genius to conceive an

[1] Hippolito keeps a skull in his chamber to remind him perpetually of his dead mistress. [2] Dekker's *Dramatic Works*, vol ii pp. 58-59.

imaginary situation as a whole, and the art to present it on the stage in a lifelike and consistent action. Wishing to raise the imagination of the spectators above the level of common experience, he lays, in Shakespeare's manner, the scene of *The Honest Whore* in foreign parts, and borrows striking situations from the plays of his great predecessor. The opening scene, for example, is clearly suggested by *Romeo and Juliet*, and Hippolito's moralisations on the skull which reminds him of mortality are inspired by the recently acted *Hamlet*. But Dekker took no more pains than Heywood to make his audience believe that imaginary events would necessarily have followed each other in the order represented, or that the characters speak and act as they do, because it is in accordance with their nature. Everything in the play is detached and unconnected. The interior of the house of the Milanese courtesan is very exactly painted in such a way as to represent manners in London. One of the scenes is laid in a madhouse, merely in order that the audience may be pleased with a "realistic" view of Bedlam. The underplot, exhibiting the "humours of the patient man and the longing wife," has nothing whatever to do with the main plot. Nor is there any more consistency in the development of the characters. Bellafront, who appears as a ribald in one scene, is a saint in the next: the Duke, who orders Hippolito to be poisoned to prevent a marriage between him and his daughter, appears at the close of the play as a just and virtuous ruler: Orlando Friscobaldo, after allowing his daughter Bellafront to continue in her evil courses for many years, suddenly conceives the idea of entering her service in the disguise of a servant, in order to bring about her reformation. Improbabilities of this kind afford a measure, not only of the difficulties attending any attempt on the part of a playwright to expand the Morality into a regular drama, but also of the extraordinary genius which Shakespeare displayed in harmonising the rude taste of his audiences with the severest rules of ideal art.

Thomas Middleton, a fellow-labourer with, and in

some respects an imitator of, Dekker, was born like him in London, at some date not long after 1570. He was the son of a gentleman, William Middleton. In 1593 he seems to have been admitted a member of Gray's Inn, and his experience at the Bar accounts for the large number of allusions in his plays to the practice of the law. It has been supposed from a passage in *The Old Law* that he began to write for the stage in 1599,[1] but his name first appears as a dramatist in 1602, in which year he is mentioned in Henslowe's Diary as joint author of a play called *Two Harpies*, and in which he produced his comedy entitled *Blurt, Master Constable*. His most fertile and characteristic period of dramatic composition was between 1607 and 1611, during which years he wrote *Michaelmas Term*, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, *The Family of Love*, *Your Five Gallants*, *A Mad World my Masters*, and *The Roaring Girl*. All these were comedies based on the representation of contemporary manners. In his later plays he conformed his style to the change of the public taste, and imitated the Spanish manner brought into vogue by Fletcher; while at the same time, like so many of his contemporaries, he found a fresh opening for employment in the production of City Pageants. The climax of his fame or notoriety was reached in 1624, when he took advantage of the state of public opinion, after the rupture of the Spanish match in the previous year, to satirise the King of Spain and his ambassador, Gondomar, in a dramatic allegory called *A Game of Chess*, in which the leading statesmen of Europe are represented by the different pieces on a chess-board. This play was so popular that the Spanish ambassador complained to the King, the performance was stopped, and the players and playwright were threatened with imprisonment. Middleton died in 1627.

This dramatist carried the realistic style of Dekker in the only direction still open to one whose main object was to provide the theatre with some new mode of entertain-

[1] See Dyce's edition of Middleton's *Works*, p. xvi.

ment. Dekker had endeavoured honestly to emphasise his abstract moral, by contrasting it with the repulsive exhibition of actual vice and folly: Middleton dropped morality almost entirely, and obtained the popular favour by the close imitation of real manners. His plays are a treasure-house for the antiquary. Possessing a knowledge of life in London only rivalled by that of Dekker, he knew how to reproduce his own experience in a dramatic form. Bawds, pandars, harlots, usurers, pawnbrokers, gulls, gallants, gamblers, doctors, judges, linen-drapers, and apprentices, crowd and bustle through the dialogue of his comedies with a vigorous zest which must have been highly palatable to the spectators of the time, and perhaps no English dramatist has inherited so much of the prosaic imitative spirit of the New Comedy at Athens. But as his highest aim was to gratify the vulgar curiosity of a somewhat brutal audience, Middleton's genius never rose into the regions of true art. There seems to be justice in Ben Jonson's judgment on him: "Markham (who added his *Arcadia*) was not of the company of the faithful, and was a base fellow: and such were Day and Middleton."[1] Form, beauty and nobility are buried out of sight in his conceptions beneath the flowing waves of depravity. In the structure of his plays he borrows with intelligence from the practice of others what he finds useful for stage-effects, and endeavours to unite the invention of Shakespeare with the "humours" of Ben Jonson and the romance of Dekker.[2] His plots, good enough for his purpose and for his audience, want the consistency and probability required for genuine comedy, whether of intrigue or character. In *Blurt, Master Constable* the hero, without any rational cause,

[1] Heads of Conversation with Drummond.

[2] The dénouement of *Blurt, Master Constable* was suggested by that of *All's Well that Ends Well;* the plan of *The Phœnix* by *Measure for Measure;* in *The Witch* Middleton imitates *Macbeth;* the character of the Mayor of Quinborough, in the play of that name, was suggested to him by Simon Eyre in *The Shoemakers' Holiday;* while in his general mode of representing real life he plainly follows in the footsteps of Ben Jonson.

is introduced into a brothel, merely that the life of the place may be represented, and that his wife may be obliged to fetch him out. In *The Phœnix* one of the characters draws up a formal deed for the sale of his wife to a courtier: *The Mayor of Quinborough* exhibits in detail the manners of London under Elizabeth in the days of Hengist and Horsa. These are but a few characteristic examples of the improbabilities abounding in the structure of Middleton's plays; the high-water mark of his invention may be inferred from the plot of what is perhaps his best constructed comedy, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*.

Witgood, a spendthrift, has wasted his estate in riotous living. In order to recover himself he arranges with a mistress, of whom he is tired, that the latter shall pass herself off as a rich widow about to marry him. By these means he hopes to regain the favour and assistance of his usurious uncle, Lucre, to whom he has mortgaged his estate, and who is at deadly feud with another usurer, Hoard. When the tidings of Witgood's approaching marriage are brought to Lucre he is as much delighted as his nephew expects; but Hoard, hearing of the affair at the same time, resolves, out of spite to Lucre, to supplant Witgood by marrying the supposed widow himself. This suits the plans of the conspirators exceedingly well. The courtesan, after a well-dissembled hesitation, is married to Hoard, but not before Witgood has made use of the situation to recover from Lucre the mortgage on his estate, by representing that thus alone can he frustrate the designs of his uncle's rival. After the marriage Witgood obtains further relief from his creditors through Hoard, who promises to pay the spendthrift's debts, on receiving from him an undertaking that he will abstain from pressing against him any claims he may have by virtue of his pre-contract to the late widow Rascal and impostor as he is, Witgood then gains the hand of Hoard's virtuous niece; Lucre's indignation against him, when the trick is discovered, is mitigated by the delight which the usurer feels at the discomfiture of Hoard; the

latter is obliged to make the best of a bad situation; and his new wife promises to abandon her old habits. The ingenuity of this plot is not unworthy of Plautus; but I venture to say there is no play of the Roman dramatist so absolutely devoid of ethical feeling as *A Trick to Catch the Old One.*

With this completely cynical view of human nature, Middleton's characters, as is natural, are suited to his ideas of dramatic action. To expect from him the exquisite refinement of Shakespeare's creations would, of course, be absurd, but we do not find in his comedies any persons imagined with the ideal distinctness of Jonson's Bobadil, Dekker's Simon Eyre, Hippolito, Bellafront, Matheo, Friscobaldo, or even Heywood's Bess Bridges. His contempt for the taste and understanding of his audience may be inferred from the names and descriptions of the leading personages in *Your Five Gallants*, viz., "Frippery, the broker-gallant; Primero, the bawd-gallant; Goldstone, the cheating-gallant; Pursenet, the pocket-gallant; Tailby, the whore-gallant." Two motives, as a rule, sway the characters he represents,—lust and greed. Within the sphere to which his imagination is restricted he can conceive character with vigour and intensity, and Charles Lamb, who gives an extract from his tragedy *Women Beware of Women*, representing a female bawd cozening an unsophisticated old woman, says justly that the particular scene gives an impression of being studied from real life.[1] Yet even on his own ground Middleton fails to make his characters seem consistently natural throughout the play: their behaviour is fitful and unconnected; they speak and act as the dramatist chooses, rather than as nature and the situation require. There is in fact in his plays the same abstract mode of thought that has been already noticed in Dekker's. Bianca, the heroine of the play I have just mentioned, appears in one scene as a matron inspired with the virtue of a Lucretia; almost immediately after she is an experienced prostitute; Leantio, her

[1] *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*, p. 155.

betrayed husband, after singing the joys of domestic love, sinks contentedly into a paid minister to the pleasures of the female bawd. In *A Mad World my Masters* the spirit of the Morality flashes out vividly for a moment in the character of Penitent Brothel, who, having actually employed a courtesan to corrupt the mind of a married woman, and having made an assignation with the latter in the disguise of a doctor, is suddenly converted by conscience, and parts from her with a sermon which, being overheard by her husband, has the further effect of curing the latter of his jealousy.

Moving in such a sphere of action and character, it is not to be expected that Middleton in his plays should attempt to elevate the imagination by poetical sentiment or diction. With the exception of the pious Cleanthes and Hippolita in *The Old Law* (characters whom I imagine to have been the creation of Massinger rather than Middleton) I cannot recall one of his female personages who speaks the language of virtue, or even of modesty, and only one man who understands the sentiment of honour. To the latter is assigned the appropriate name of Phœnix; and his view of the world may be charitably accepted as expressing the experience of the dramatist himself:—

> So much have the complaints and suits of men, seven, nay, seventeen years neglected, still interposed by coin and great enemies, prevailed with my pity, that I cannot otherwise think but there are infectious dealings in most offices, and foul mysteries throughout all professions: and therefore I nothing doubt but to find travel enough within myself, and experience I fear too much: nor will I be curious to fit my body to the humblest form and bearing, so the labour may be fruitful; for how can abuses that keep low come to the right view of a prince, unless his looks lie level with them, which else shall be longest hid from him?—he shall be the last man sees 'em.[1]

Almost the only elevated thoughts in Middleton's plays are put into the mouth of this prince, and one of such passages (a soliloquy after he has witnessed the sale of a wife by her husband) may be cited because it appears to have struck the imagination of Milton —

[1] *The Phœnix*, Act I. Sc. 1.

Of all deeds yet this strikes the deepest wound
Into my apprehension.
Reverend and honourable Matrimony,
Mother of lawful sweets, unshamed mornings,
Dangerless pleasures, thou that mak'st the bed
Both pleasant and legitimately fruitful!
Without thee,
All the whole world were soiled bastardy.
Thou art the only and the greatest form,
That put'st a difference between our desires,
And the disordered appetites of beasts,
Making their mates those that stand next their lusts.[1]

Even here the materialism, which lies at the base of all Middleton's ideas, discloses itself, and the value of his praises of marriage, as well as the standard of refinement in his diction, may be measured by the language of Maria in *The Family of Love*, a character whom he evidently means the reader to admire, for her lover says:—

My love's chaste smile to all the world doth speak
Her spotless innocence.[2]

This Maria reproves some loose talk of her aunt about love as follows:—

Disgrace not that for which our sect[3] was made,
Society in nuptials: 'bove those joys
Which lovers taste when their conjoined life
Suck forth each other's souls, the earth, the air,
Yea gods themselves know none, etc.[4]

[1] *The Phœnix*, Act ii. Sc. 2. Compare *Paradise Lost*, iv. 750-762.
[2] *Family of Love*, Act i. Sc. 2.
[3] *I.e.* sex.
[4] *Family of Love*, Act ii. Sc. 4.

CHAPTER IX

THE DRAMATIC TASTE OF THE CITY: ROMANCE AND MELODRAMA—*ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM*, CHAPMAN, MARSTON, TOURNEUR, AND WEBSTER

I USE melodrama in its secondary and acquired sense, meaning a play in which tragic situations, characters, sentiments, and diction are pushed so far beyond the limits imposed by art and nature as to produce in the mind a sense of exaggeration and improbability. Like the tragic poet, the melodramatist aims at arousing the feelings of pity and terror, but he writes, as a rule, with such a complete want of moral restraint that he deprives the soul of the "purgation" which Aristotle says ought in tragedy to be applied to those passions.[1] Melodrama abolishes all gradations of light and shade: virtue and vice are in it opposed to each other with the crudest contrasts. The actions represented generally involve murder, revenge, or some kind of unlawful love: the motives by which the actors are prompted are as simple as their passions are violent: the interest depends rather upon a succession of strong physical sensations, than upon complex entanglements, brought about by the moral and intellectual opposition between good and evil. Accordingly there are few melodramas that will stand the test of reading: their poetic life expires when it loses the illusion lent to it by the unreal lights, the simulated emotions, and the mechanical appliances of the stage

The typical melodramatist of the classic stage was Seneca, and the relation of melodrama to tragedy cannot

[1] Aristotle's *Poetics*, vi. 2.

be better illustrated than by his treatment of the great myths as compared with the method of Sophocles. Both these poets, for example, represent the story of Œdipus, but whereas in the *Œdipus Rex*, after the terrible catastrophe, we see no more of Jocasta, Seneca, wishing in his play to exhaust all the possibilities of horror, positively brings her face to face with her husband-son. In the same way, in his *Hercules Furens*, after the hero has put on the poisoned garment, Seneca makes the climax of the tragedy a display of his physical sufferings, piling up images in his mouth to help the reader to conceive the horrible pain he is enduring; in the *Trachiniæ*, on the contrary, all the furious actions and speeches of Hercules precede the discovery that his death is the effect of destiny and mischance, not of deliberate crime; the close of the play is devoted to exhibiting the manly resolution and unselfish thought for others with which he faces his doom.

Seneca was the parent of the romantic melodrama of the Elizabethan theatre. Following the example of Marlowe, all the English poets who wrote in this manner imitated the extravagances of the Roman dramatist, but they replaced his stoical philosophy with the moral system popularised by *The Prince* of Machiavelli. Three distinct types of melodrama are found among their plays: (1) the Domestic Tragedy, represented by such plays as *Arden of Feversham* and *The Yorkshire Tragedy;* (2) Foreign, Domestic, and Political Tragedies, of which the chief examples are Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris*, Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois*, *Conspiracy*, and *Tragedy of Byron*, and *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany;* (3) Tragedies of Crime and Revenge, founded on tales and legends, such as Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Marston's *Antonio and Mellida*, and *Antonio's Revenge*, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, Webster's *Duchess of Malfy*, and Tourneur's *Atheist's* and *Revenger's Tragedy*. All these, as a rule, bear on their face the signs that they were intended to gratify certain well-ascertained expectations in the audience: they resemble each other in the selection of subject,—stories of murder, revenge, conspiracy; in their exhibition of mean and villainous characters; in their use

of the machinery of stage horror,—skulls, spectres, skeletons, strangulations, poisoned bowls, midnight bells, churchyards, and the like; and also in the strength of the imagery by means of which they elevate the minds of the spectators into sympathy with scenes of gloom and bloodshed. At the same time, as several of these poets were men of real imagination and learning, they showed much versatility in the treatment of their subjects, and their respective styles are stamped with a character which makes each of them deserving of separate consideration.

In 1592 was published:—

The lamentable and true Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent, who was most wickedlye murdered by the meanes of his disloyall and wanton wife, who, for the love she bore to one Mosbie, hyred two desperat ruffins, Blackwill and Shakbag, to kill him. Wherein is showed the great malice and dissimulation of a wicked woman, the unsatiable desire of filthier lust, and the shamefull end of all murderers. Imprinted at London for Edward White, dwelling at the little North door of Paul's Church, at the Signe of the Gun.

The play so described, is, in my opinion, the finest poetical melodrama in the English language, and often approaches the heights of genuine tragedy. It is founded on the murder of Thomas Arden or Ardern, Mayor of Feversham, which was perpetrated on Sunday the 15th February 1550-51, and which made so deep an impression on the public imagination that Holinshed gives up several pages to recording it in his *Chronicle*, apologising to the reader as follows for his exceptional treatment of the event:—

The which murder for the horribleness thereof, though otherwise it may seem but a private matter, and therefore as it were impertinent to this history, I have thought good to set it forth somewhat at large, having the instructions delivered to me by them that have used some diligence to gather the true understanding of the circumstances.[1]

In the historian's narrative there is much epic vivacity, and the dramatist, whoever he was, in converting it into a

[1] Holinshed's *Chronicle* (1st edition), 1577, p. 1703

form fit for the stage, has shown so powerful an imagination, that the question has been raised whether the play can have proceeded from any mind but one. Contrary answers have been given by competent critics. An acute and well-informed writer in *The Edinburgh Review* says:—

> The third play, *Arden of Feversham*, a domestic tragedy, would, in point of absolute merit, have done no discredit to the early manhood of Shakspeare himself; but both in conception and execution it is quite unlike even his earliest manner, while, on the other hand, its date cannot possibly be removed so far back as the time before which his own style had demonstrably been found.[1]

Mr. Swinburne is of a different opinion:—

> I cannot but finally take heart to say, even in the absence of all external or traditional testimony, that it seems to me not pardonable merely or permissible, but simply logical and reasonable, to set down this poem, a young man's work on the face of it, as the possible work of no man's youthful hand but Shakespeare's.[2]

With this conclusion I unreservedly agree. And since I dissent as decidedly from every word of the passage I have cited from *The Edinburgh Review*, I give here my reasons for believing the play to be Shakespeare's, especially as the extracts I shall make from the play will enable the reader to form his own opinion of the merits of *Arden of Feversham*.

1. No other dramatist but Shakespeare in 1592—not Marlowe or Kyd, Greene or Peele—could have produced a play so admirable in structure, distinguished by such variety of character, such a profound knowledge of human motives, and expressed in language at once so rich, so lofty, and so simple.

2. On the other hand, in respect both of action, character, sentiment and diction, the style of the tragedy is precisely what I have already shown to have been the style of Shakespeare in 1592.

The author follows Holinshed with the same minute attention to detail as Shakespeare shows in *King Henry VI.* In the treatment of his subject he has always an

[1] *Edinburgh Review*, No. lxxi., p. 471.
[2] *Study of Shakespeare*, p. 141. By A. C. Swinburne.

eye to Marlowe, as may be seen from the direct imitation of that poet in the following melodramatic description of a robber:—

WILL. *What manner of man was he?*
BRADSHAW. A lean-faced writhen knave,
Hawk-nosed, and very hollow eyed,
With mighty furrows in his stormy brows,
Long hair down his shoulders curled;
His chin was bare, but on his upper lip
A mutchado which he wound about his ear.[1]

Marlowe is also imitated in the Machiavellian figure of Mosbie, characteristically modified as this is by the uneasy conscience which (with the exception of Aaron, Iago, and possibly Edmund) accompanies all the villains of Shakespeare:—

Disturbed thoughts drives me from company,
And dries my marrow with their watchfulness;
Continual trouble of my moody brain
Feebles my body by excess of drink,
And nips me, as the bitter north east wind
Doth check the tender blossoms in the spring.
Well fares the man, howe'er his cates do taste,
That tables not with foul suspicion;
And he but pines among his delicates,
Whose troubled mind is stuffed with discontent.
My golden time was when I had no gold;
Though then I wanted yet I slept secure,
My daily toil begat me night's repose,
My night's repose made daylight fresh to me.
But since I climbed the top-bough of the tree,
And sought to build my nest among the clouds,
Each gentle stirring gale doth shake my bed,
And make me dread my downfall to the earth.
But whither doth contemplation carry me?
The way I seek to find where pleasure dwells
Is hedged beneath me that I cannot back
But needs must on, although to danger's gate.
Then, Arden, perish thou by that decree.
For Greene doth ear the land and weed thee up
To make my harvest nothing but pure corn.[2]

[1] *Arden of Feversham*, Act II. Sc. 1. Compare Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, Act. IV.:—

That when he speaks draws out his grisly beard,
And draws it twice or thrice across his ear.

[2] *Arden of Feversham*, Act III Sc. 5.

Mosbie goes on to say, in true Machiavellian style, that he must remove out of his way all his confederates in the contemplated murder. I do not think that any one who compares the diction of the above passage with the speeches of the Bastard in the first draft of *King John* will be of the Edinburgh reviewer's opinion that it is "quite unlike Shakespeare's earliest manner."[1] Again, if the agony of powerful imagination in the conscience-haunted servant, Michael, be compared with the deathbed scene of Cardinal Beaufort in the *Second Part of King Henry VI.*, we see that it is just the kind of work which Shakespeare would have been likely to produce at this period of his dramatic development:—

MICHAEL. Conflicting thoughts, encampèd in my breast,
Awake me with the echo of their strokes,
And I, a judge to censure either side,
Can give to neither wishèd victory.
My master's kindness pleads to me for life
With just demand, and I must grant it him:
My mistress, she hath forced me with an oath,
For Susan's sake, the which I may not break,
For that is nearer than a master's love.
That grim-faced fellow, pitiless Black Will,
And Shakebag stern in bloody stratagem,
(Two rougher ruffians never lived in Kent,)
Have sworn my death if I infringe my vow:—
A dreadful thing to be considered of.
Methinks I see them with their bolstered hair,
Staring and grinning in thy gentle face,
And in their ruthless hands their daggers drawn
Insulting o'er thee with a peck of oaths,
Whilst thou, submissive, pleading for relief,
Art mangled by their ireful instruments.—
Methinks I hear them ask where Michael is,
And pitiless Black Will cries: "Stab the slave;
The peasant will detect the tragedy."
The wrinkles in his foul death-threatening face
Gape open wide, like graves to swallow men.
My death to him is but a merriment,
And he will murder me to make him sport.
He comes, he comes. Ah, Master Francklin, help,
Call up the neighbours, or we are but dead.[2]

[1] See the passage cited on p. 60, and Appendix, pp. 464-465.
[2] *Arden of Feversham*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

Nor is the mixture of softness and ferocious resolution, in the character of Mrs. Arden, at all unlike the fluctuating moods of passion in Margaret of Anjou, as represented in her parting with Suffolk in the *Second Part of King Henry VI.*:—

ALICE. Look on me, Mosbie, or I'll kill myself;
Nothing shall hide me from thy stormy look.
If thou cry war, there is no peace for me;
I will do penance for offending thee,
And burn this prayer-book, where I here use,
The holy word that had converted me.
See, Mosbie, I will tear away the leaves,
And all the leaves, and in this golden cover
Shall thy sweet phrases and thy letters dwell;
And thereon will I chiefly meditate,
And hold no other sect, but such devotion.
Wilt thou not look? Is all thy love o'erwhelmed?
Wilt thou not hear? What silence ties thy tongue?
Thou hast been sighted as the eagle is,
And heard as quickly as the fearful hare,
And spoke as smoothly as an orator,
When I have bid thee hear, or see, or speak;
And art thou sensible in none of these?
Weigh all the good turns with this little fault,
And I deserve not Mosbie's muddy looks.
A fence of trouble is not thickened still·
Be clear again, I'll ne'er more trouble thee.[1]

But while I think, with Mr. Swinburne, that in passages like these we have unmistakable proof of the early hand of Shakespeare, I also agree with Mr. Saintsbury, who says:—

Both in the selection and in the treatment the play definitely transgresses those principles which have been said to exhibit themselves so uniformly and so strongly in the whole great body of his undoubted plays There is a perversity and a dash of sordidness which are both wholly un-Shakespearian The only possible hypothesis on which it could be admitted as Shakespeare's would be that of an early experiment, thrown off while he was seeking his way in a direction where he found no thoroughfare.[2]

Shakespeare must have felt that the tragic style of *Arden of Feversham* was unsuited to the mean and sordid

[1] *Arden of Feversham*, Act III. Sc 5
[2] *History of Elizabethan Literature*, p. 425.

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Staring and grinning in thy gentle face,
And in their ruthless hands their dagge[illegible]
Insulting o'er thee with a peck of o[illegible]
Whilst thou, submissive, pleadin[illegible]
Art mangled by their ireful in[illegible]
Methinks I hear them ask[illegible]
And pitiless Black Wil[illegible]
The peasant will d[illegible]
The wrinkles in [illegible]
Gape open [illegible]
My deat[illegible]
And he w[illegible]
He comes, h[illegible]
Call up the neig[illegible]

[1] See the passage cited on p. 6[illegible],
[2] *Arden of Feversham*, [illegible]

domestic melodrama entitled *A Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother*, a tragedy which, perhaps fortunately for the reputation of its authors, has not survived.

2. Materials for melodrama were also found in the political tragedies of foreign countries. Marlowe had led the way in this direction by *The Massacre at Paris*, and his steps were followed by George Chapman (1559-1634), who had already declared himself Marlowe's disciple in epic poetry by his continuation of *Hero and Leander* (1598). It may be conjectured that Chapman after 1600 turned to play-writing against his will, for the character of his early works is certainly not dramatic; he had begun his great task of translating Homer; and in his dedication of the first seven Iliads to the Earl of Essex (1598) he complains of the difficulty of obtaining a livelihood by literature. The popular tastes which he was obliged to consult in his plays were probably not very congenial to his learned and philosophic mind. Oldys says of him that "he preserved in his own person the dignity of poetry, which he compared to a flower of the sun that disdains to open its leaves to the eye of a smoking taper"[1] Forced by his necessities to write for the stage, he brought to the composition of tragedy something of the stern mediæval spirit of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, together with something of the lofty epic style proper to a translator of Homer; and when he wanted a subject for melodrama, he looked for one which would enable him to moralise profoundly over the passions and the downfall of mighty men. In such a spirit he seems to have composed his tragedies entitled *Bussy d'Ambois* (1607) and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (1613), as well as the two plays called *The Conspiracy and the Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608) and *The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France* published in 1639, after his death. There was, of course, much in the tragedies of Seneca which served his purpose when treating subjects like these; and in his long declamatory speeches, and in the violence of his imagery, he shows himself a zealous imitator of the Roman poet.

[1] MS. note, Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691), p. 58

Let the reader judge by the following brief account of the plot of *Antonio's Revenge*, and a few characteristic extracts which will serve as samples of Marston's "tragic" style, how far the entertainment actually provided for the spectators fulfils the expectations aroused by this "solemn preparation."

Andrugio, Duke of Genoa, and Piero, Duke of Venice, were both in love with Maria, daughter of the Duke of Ferrara. She married the former and they had a son, Antonio: Piero thirsted for revenge. *Antonio and Mellida* opens long years afterwards, when Andrugio, being at war with Piero, is defeated and a refugee on his enemy's territory. Antonio is in love with Piero's daughter, Mellida, and the Duke of Venice has offered a large reward for his head; but after many exciting adventures a reconciliation is apparently effected between Andrugio and Piero, and a marriage arranged between Antonio and Mellida. Piero, however, is only dissembling, and when the play of *Antonio's Revenge* opens the situation may be gathered from the following scene:—

ACT I. SCENE I.

Enter PIERO *unbraced, his arms bare, smeared in blood, a poniard in one hand bloody, and a torch in the other;* STROTZO *following him with a cord.*

PIERO. Ho, Gasper Strotzo, bind Feliche's trunk.[1]
Unto the panting side of Mellida! [*Exit Strotzo.*]
'Tis yet dead night, yet all the earth is clutched
In the dull leaden hand of snoring sleep;
No breath disturbs the quiet of the air;
No spirit moves upon the breast of earth,
Save howling dogs, night-crows, and screeching owls,
Save meagre ghosts, Piero, and black thoughts.
One, two! [*Clock strikes.*]
Lord, in two hours what a topless mount
Of unpeered mischief have these hands cast up!
[*Re-enter* STROTZO.]
I can scarce coop triumphing vengeance up
From bursting forth in braggart passion.
STR. My lord, 'tis firmly said that——
PIERO. Andrugio sleeps in peace: this brain hath choked
The organ of his breast. Feliche hangs

[1] A friend of Antonio's whom Piero has murdered merely for the purpose he describes.

But as a bait upon the line of death,
To tice on mischief. I am great in blood,
Unequalled in revenge. You horrid scouts
That sentinel swart night, give large applause
From your large palms First, know my heart was raised
Unto Andrugio's life upon this ground:

STR. Duke, 'tis reported——

PIERO. We both were rivals in our May of blood
Unto Maria, fair Ferrara's heir.
He won the lady to my honour's death,
And from her sweets cropped this Antonio·
For which I burnt in inward sweltering hate,
And fostered rankling malice in my breast,
Till I might belk revenge upon his eyes
And now (O blessèd now!) 'tis done. Hell, night,
Give loud applause to my hypocrisy.

Antonio, coming in the morning to salute his bride with music, finds the corpse of Feliche hanging out of her window; and Piero presently appears to explain to him and to Feliche's father that the dead man was killed by him on the evidence of Strotzo that he was found in adulterous intercourse with Mellida; at the same time Maria, who has been sent for to be present at Antonio's wedding, receives tidings of the death of Andrugio from a supposed stroke of apoplexy. Mellida is put in prison to await her trial for her offence against chastity, but Piero arranges with Strotzo that, when his daughter is before the judges, his accomplice is to rush into court with a rope round his neck, asking to be put to death as having borne false witness against Mellida and Feliche at the instigation of Antonio; Piero is to pardon Strotzo in consideration of his penitent behaviour, but Antonio is to be executed without delay. This is the position of affairs before the third act, which opens thus:—

A dumb show. The cornets sounding for the Act. Enter Castilio and Forobosco, Alberto and Baluardo with poleaxes; Piero talking with Strotzo seemeth to send him out: exit Strotzo. Re-enter Strotzo with Maria, Nutriche, and Lucio. Piero passeth through his guard and talks with Maria with seeming amorousness; she seemeth to reject his suit, flies to the tomb, kneels, and k[illegible] Piero brites Nutriche and Lucio; they go to her, seeming [illegible] his suit. She riseth, offers to go out; Piero stayeth her, [illegible] his breast, embraceth and kisseth her; and so they all go out

Enter the DUKE.

DUKE. Piato, well done; hast brought her? What lady is't?
VIND. Faith, my lord, a country lady, a little bashful at first, as most of them are, but after the first kiss, my lord, the worst is past with them; your grace knows now what you have to do; she's a somewhat grave look with her—but——
DUKE. I love that best, conduct her.
VIND. Have at all.
DUKE. In gravest looks the greatest faults seem less,
Give me that sin that's robed in holiness.
VIND. Back with the torch: brother, raise the perfumes.
DUKE. How sweet can a duke breathe! age has no fault:
Pleasure should meet in a perfumed mist.
Lady, sweetly encountered! I come from court;
I must be bold with you. Oh! what's this? Oh!
VIND. Royal villain! White devil!
DUKE. Oh!
VIND. Brother, place the torch here, that his affrighted eye-bails
May start into those hollows. Duke, dost know
Yon dreadful vizard? view it well: 'tis the skull
Of Gloriana whom thou poisonedst last.
DUKE. Oh, 'tas poisoned me!
VIND. Didst not know that till now?
DUKE. What are you two?
VIND. Villains all three—the very ragged bone
Has been sufficiently revenged. Etc., etc.[1]

John Webster is a dramatist of altogether different quality. He brought to the treatment of melodrama an elevating and refining influence which raised this kind of play as nearly as possible to the level of genuine tragedy; and, though he did not succeed in purging it of all the imperfections entailed upon it by the bad taste of his predecessors and the spectators, he yet rendered it in a high degree powerful, interesting, and affecting. As is the case with so many of his contemporaries, very little is known of his personal history. He describes himself in the Dedication to his *Monuments of Honour* as "one born free of the Merchant Tailors' Company"; hence Mr. Collier supposes him to have been the son of John Webster, merchant tailor, who had business dealings with the actor Edward Alleyn. Gildon, at the close of the seventeenth

[1] *Revenger's Tragedy*, Act iii. Sc. 5.

century, affirmed that he was Clerk of St. Andrew's, Holborn; beyond this, even legend is silent about the events of his life. In the dedication of his *Devil's Law Case* he lays claim to a play called *The Gwisse, i.e. The Guise*, which may be the same as that referred to by Henslowe in his Diary as early as 1601. It seems to me scarcely likely that he should have written on a subject recently treated by Marlowe, and I should imagine that the drama in question was merely *The Massacre at Paris*, with alterations and additions by Webster. He co-operated with Heywood, Dekker, Chettle, Munday, Middleton, and Drayton in the production of plays which have not survived, viz. *The Two Harpies*, *Cæsar's Fall*, *Christmas comes but once a Year*. In conjunction with Dekker, he wrote *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, *Westward Ho*, and *Northward Ho*; and was part author with Marston of *The Malcontent*. Of the plays of which he was the sole composer, *The White Devil* was first published in 1612; *The Duchess of Malfi* (acted in 1616) and *The Devil's Law Case* in 1623; and *Appius and Virginia* (which of course must have been acted long before) in 1654. *Monuments of Honour* was written for the City Pageant in 1624; and as there is no later mention of his name in the annals of the stage, it may be conjectured that he died not long after this date.

Webster was a slow and careful writer. In the dedication to the reader prefixed to *The White Devil* he says:—

> To those who report that I was a long time in finishing this tragedy I confess I do not write with a goose-quill winged with two feathers; and if they will needs make it my fault I must answer them with that of Euripides to Alcestides, a tragic writer. Alcestides objecting that Euripides had only in three days composed three verses, whereas he himself had written three hundred: "Thou tellest truth," quoth he, "but here's the difference,—thine shall only be read for three days, whereas mine shall continue three ages"
>
> Detraction is the sworn friend to ignorance: for mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinion of other men's worthy labours; especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of

prattling innocent, asking "What do the dead do, uncle? Do they eat?" concludes the play with a sermon:—

> Remove the bodies—see, my honoured lords,
> What use you ought make of their punishment:
> Let guilty men remember their black deeds
> Do lean on crutches made of slender reeds.

Every passion is strained to the highest pitch, for the purpose of harrowing the souls of the spectators. Ferdinand, the wicked Duke of Calabria, after deliberately agonising the last moments of his sister, by presenting to her what she supposes to be the hand of her dead husband, and by surrounding her with a dance of madmen, says to Bosola, the agent of his villainies:—

> Let me see her face
> Again. Why didst not thou pity her? What
> An excellent, honest man might'st thou have been,
> If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!
> Or, bold in a good cause, oppos'd thyself,
> With thy advancèd sword above thy head,
> Between her innocence and my revenge!
> I bade thee, when I was distracted of my wits,
> Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast done 't.[1]

It is not to be denied that human nature is subject to these violent revolutions of feeling; but they ought to be represented with profound knowledge and skill in order to make them credible. Evidently the scene from which the above passage is taken is imitated from the interview between Shakespeare's Hubert and King John, when the latter supposes Arthur to be dead; but, if any one wishes to note the difference between tragedy and melodrama, let him observe the manner in which Shakespeare has rendered probable the succession of conflicting feelings in John's mind, and then contrast it either with Ferdinand's repentance, or with that of the compassionate murderer Bosola, weeping over the Duchess's dead body:—

> Oh, she's gone again! there the cords of life broke.
> O sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps

[1] *Duchess of Malfi*, Act iv. Sc. 2.

> *On turtles' feathers*, whilst a guilty conscience
> Is a black register, wherein is writ
> All our good deeds and bad, a perspective
> That shows us hell! That we cannot be suffer'd
> To do good when we have a mind to it!
> This is manly sorrow;
> These tears, I am very certain, never grew
> In my mother's milk: my estate is sunk
> Below the degree of fear; where were
> These penitent fountains while she was living?
> Oh, they were frozen up![1]

In his power of imagining and expressing the motives by which men commit great crimes, Webster seems to me to be distinctly inferior to the author of *Arden of Feversham:* he is superior to the latter only in imagery and versification. In both of these respects he shows himself a close student of Shakespeare, whose unequalled richness of fancy has furnished Webster with many hints, which, like a true artist, he has known how to put out at good interest. No poet was ever more economical of his own resources. Like Seneca, he is always thinking of sentences, and, when he has lighted on a thought which pleases him, he is pretty sure to remember it for future use. Here are some examples:—

> Perfumes, the more they are chafed, the more they render
> Their pleasing scents.—*Vittoria Corombona.*

> Man, like to cassia, is prov'd best, being bruis'd.
> —*Duchess of Malfi.*

> Glories, like glowworms, afar off shine bright,
> But, look'd to near, have neither heat nor light.
> —*Vittoria Corombona.*

This couplet is repeated without change in *The Duchess of Malfi.*

> 'Twere fit you think on what hath former bin;
> I have heard grief named the eldest child of sin.
> —*Vittoria Corombona.*

> I suffer now for what hath former bin:
> Sorrow is held the eldest child of sin.—*Duchess of Malfi.*

[1] *Duchess of Malfi*, Act. iv. Sc. 2.

I have seen children oft eat sweet-meats thus,
As fearful to devour them too soon.—*Duchess of Malfi.*

This is repeated, with the omission of "too soon," in the *Appius and Virginia.*

You would look up to heaven, but I think
The devil, that rules i' the air, stands in your light.
—*Duchess of Malfi.*

While they aspire to do themselves most right,
The devil, that rules i' the air, hangs in their light.
—*The Devil's Law Case*

A count! he's a mere stick of sugar-candy.—*Duchess of Malfi*

'Tis concluded you are a fool, a precious one; you are a mere stick of sugar-candy.—*The Devil's Law Case.*

For though our national law distinguish bastards
From true legitimate issue, compassionate nature
Makes them all equal.—*Duchess of Malfi.*

For though our civil law makes differences
Between the base and the legitimate,
Compassionate nature makes them equal.
—*The Devil's Law C*

Such self-repetitions, extremely characteristic of laborious and economical art of Webst[illegible] should be remembered when that is spoken of as to be compared with the boundless affluc[illegible] speare's genius.

CHAPTER X

BEN JONSON AND THE ANTI-ROMANTIC REACTION

THE life of Ben Jonson may be described, in the words applied by Pope to the character of Atossa, as "a warfare upon earth." In the early days of his dramatic career we find him at war with two of his fellow playwrights: at war soon afterwards with the players: at war in his decline with the audience who were his judges in the theatre: at war in the very eve of his days with the fellow-labourer who shared with him the patronage of the Court. This turbulent experience is set down, by critics who dislike him, solely to the account of a quarrelsome, envious, and malignant temper; and it need not be denied that Jonson had mainly himself to blame for many of the troubles in which he was involved. But to infer from his aggressive self-esteem that his arrogant judgment of other men's work was the reflection of a petty personal jealousy, is to view the art and the character of a great man in false perspective. Jonson's want of moderation was due not only to himself but to his circum- [illegible] was the champion of a [illegible] s not understood by the [illegible] was his advocacy of his own principles, the respect in which he was held by his contemporaries, the weight attaching to his name with posterity, and the soundness and solidity of his work, ought to raise him above the charge of meanness with which a petty partisanship has sought to degrade his memory.

Firmly planted on the ground of his own learning, he upheld, almost alone, against the strongly running tide of Romanticism, the didactic standard of the Morality, and the critical principles of the Classic drama. Nor did he contend in vain. Gradually, whatever was weighty in the taste of the nation rallied to his support, and from the appearance of *Volpone* the need was felt for a stricter standard of dramatic probability than had been exacted in the case of plays like *The Four Prentices of London* or *Antonio and Mellida.* The more elaborate structure of the dramas of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Ford, and of Massinger, is a silent tribute to the influence of Jonson's genius on the minds of the dramatists who followed the Romantic tradition; while the praises of practised playwrights like Dryden in the seventeenth, and Cumberland in the eighteenth century, show the position assigned to *The Silent Woman* in determining the standard of English comedy. To what extent the genius of romance was injured by the new rules of conscious criticism, applied to play-writing, is a question which can be best considered in a survey of Jonson's position in the history of the English drama. Meantime the strength of his personality, manifesting itself in each of his dramas, enables us to treat *pari passu* the events of his life and the development of his genius.

Ben Jonson was born in Westminster in 1573. He was the posthumous child of a member of an honourable Scottish family, who had removed to England and served under Henry VIII. His mother married for her second husband a master bricklayer, and her son was sent to school first at St. Martin's in the Fields, and afterwards to Westminster, where Camden the antiquary was at the time second master. Camden imparted to his pupil much of his own great learning, and Jonson never forgot his debt to him. In his Epigrams he addresses him as

> Camden, most reverend head to whom I owe
> All that I am in arts, and all I know;

and, in dedicating to him his first celebrated play, he speaks

of himself as "not one of those who can suffer the benefit conferred upon his youth to perish with his age." From Westminster he was sent to Cambridge, where, Fuller says, "he was statutably admitted into St. John's College; but, as the 'exhibition'[1] he enjoyed was not sufficient for his support, he soon returned to Westminster, and joined his stepfather in his business as bricklayer. Finding this occupation extremely distasteful to him, he volunteered for service in the Low Countries, and, according to his own account, "in the face of both camps, killed an enemy and took *opima spolia* from him." After serving for one campaign, he returned to England. If we were to follow his own narrative to Drummond, we should have to suppose his next exploit was that, "being appealed to the Fields, he had killed his adversary which had hurt him in the arm, and whose sword was ten inches longer than his; to the which he was imprisoned and almost at the gallows" The adversary alluded to was Gabriel Spencer, an actor in Henslowe's Company;[2] but as the incident occurred in 1598, it is plain that many things must have previously happened to Jonson after his return from Flanders. One of the earliest among these was his marriage in 1592; and it may be reasonably supposed that he began to write for the stage as a means of supporting himself and his wife, who bore him a daughter in 1593. The earliest mention of his dramatic writings is found in Henslowe's Diary, from which it appears that *Every Man in his Humour* had been acted eleven times between 25th November 1596 and 10th May 1597. When this play was first produced the scene was laid in Italy, and all the characters had Italian names. It was brought out at the Rose Theatre by Henslowe and Alleyn, and proved a great success. I should imagine with Gifford that *The Case is Altered*—which is obviously an early work, the plot being borrowed from Terence and Plautus, and the scene also laid in Italy—was written either before

[1] Aubrey (*Lives of Eminent Men*) says that the person who had hitherto helped him procured him an "exhibition"—but this word may only be used in the sense of "allowance."

[2] Collier, *Life of Alleyn*, p. 50.

In the course of dramatic action which he thus prescribed for himself, Jonson was taking the last step in the development of the old English Morality. We have seen how this species of play, from being an instrument of pure instruction, had gradually, by the direct imitation of manners, approached in character the New Comedy of the Greeks; how, for example, in *The Three Ladies of London* an abstract moral view of the world is presented by the action of a number of allegorical figures closely resembling the personages of real life.[1] Jonson replaced these abstractions by men, and modelled his dialogue on that of Plautus and Terence; otherwise, in his close imitation of

> Deeds, and language, such as men do use,
> And persons, such as Comedy would choose,
> When she would show an image of the times,
> And sport with human follies, not with crimes,

his comic ideal did not materially differ from the late Moralities.

Nevertheless, *Every Man in his Humour* shows traces of a certain wavering between the mediæval and classical principles of imitation. At the opening we are led to expect a play something like the *Adelphi* of Terence, showing how old Knowell's theories of paternal discipline were justified by his experience in the case of his son. But this general idea is soon lost sight of, and it becomes apparent that what mainly interests the poet is the representation of particular humours. What Jonson meant by "humour" he was afterwards at some pains to define.

> Now thus far
> It may, by metaphor, apply itself
> Unto the general disposition:
> As where some one peculiar quality
> Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
> All his effects, his spirits, and his powers,
> In their confluctions, all to run one way,
> This may be truly said to be a humour.[2]

When, therefore, every man is said to be represented

[1] Vol. ii. p. 347. [2] Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour*.

in his humour, we are to understand that a number of people are exhibited on the stage each following the bent of what Pope calls his "ruling passion." Many of the *dramatis personæ* in Jonson's earliest play, *e.g.* the elder and younger Knowell, Well-bred, Justice Clement, and others, have no very distinct humour; others, such as Cob the water-carrier, are imitations of grotesque figures in low life; and Brainworm, the servant of Knowell, in his constant disguises, is a shadowy recollection of the ingenious slaves of Greek and Roman comedy. On the other hand, all Jonson's strength is thrown into the humours of Captain Bobadil, the two "gulls" of town and country, Master Stephen and Master Matthew, and the jealous husband Kitely, all of whom are faithful portraits of contemporary modes of folly.

The applause with which they were greeted confirmed Jonson in his determination to follow a line of his own, which he henceforth explained and defended by constantly introducing critics into his plays His next comedy, *Every Man out of his Humour*, produced in 1599, was preceded by an Induction containing a dialogue between three persons, Asper, the presenter of the play; Cordatus, his friend and confidant; and Mitis, a candid spectator, who raises mild objections which Cordatus removes. The following extract throws an interesting light on Jonson's comic practice :—

MITIS. You have seen his play, Cordatus . pray you, how is it?

CORDATUS. Faith, sir, I must refrain to judge, only this I can say of it, 'tis strange, and of a particular kind by itself, somewhat like *Vetus Comœdia*, a work that hath bounteously pleased me; how it will answer the general expectation I know not

MIT. Does he observe all the laws of comedy in it?

COR. What laws mean you?

MIT. Why, the equal division of it into acts and scenes, according to the Terentian manner; his true number of actors; the furnishing of the scene with Grex or Chorus, and that the whole argument fall within compass of a day's business?

COR. O no, these are too nice observations.

MIT. They are such as must be received, by your favour, or it cannot be authentic.

COR. Troth, I can discern no such necessity.

MIT. No!

COR. No, I assure you, signior. If those laws you speak of had been delivered us *ab initio*, and in their present virtue and perfection, there had been some reason of obeying their powers; but 'tis extant that that which we call *Comœdia* was at first nothing but a simple and continued song, sung by only one person, till Susario invented a second; after him, Epicharmus a third; Phormus and Chionides devised to have four actors, with a prologue and chorus; to which Cratinus, long after, added a fifth and sixth; Eupolis more; Aristophanes more than they: every man, in the dignity of his spirit and judgment, supplied something. And though that in him this kind of poem appeared absolute, and fully perfected, yet how the face of it changed since, in Menander, Philemon, Cecilius, Plautus, and the rest, who have utterly excluded the chorus, altered the property of the persons, their names and natures, and augmented it with all liberty, according to the elegancy and disposition of those times wherein they wrote. I see not then but we should enjoy the same license or free power to illustrate and heighten our invention as they did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us.

Every Man out of his Humour is one of the most characteristic of all Jonson's plays. Dropping completely even that vestige of general idea with which he had opened *Every Man in his Humour*, he grouped together on the stage fourteen distinct types of character, each of them representative of some vice or folly peculiar to the times; and he shifted the scene from the country to the middle aisle of old St. Paul's, thence to the house of a city merchant, and thence again to the interior of the Palace or the tap-room of the Mitre Inn, according as it was necessary to exhibit each humour in an ever varying light. As far as any plot is possible in working out the fortunes of so many *dramatis personæ*, every one of whom is in pursuit of a different kind of folly, it is furnished by the contrivance of the envious man, Macilente, whose amiable humour prompts him to conspire against the tastes and designs of his more prosperous neighbours. When this person has succeeded in bringing them all out of their humours, his own humour is satiated, and he exclaims at the close of the play:—

> Why, here's a change! now is my soul at peace:
> I am as empty of all envy now,

> As they of merit to be envied at.
> My humour, like a flame, no longer lasts
> Than it hath stuff to feed it; and their folly,
> Being now raked up in their repentant ashes,
> Affords no ampler subject to my spleen.
> I am so far from malicing their states,
> That I begin to pity them.[1]

From the general stage of life Jonson transferred his observation and satire to a smaller sphere, and, in *Cynthia's Revels, or the Fountain of Self-Love*, first acted in 1600, took for his subject the peculiar affectations of language and manners practised by a section of the courtiers. He was careful to show that he was not aiming at the Court itself, to which, when James I. was on the throne, he dedicated his play in the following words:—

To the Special Fountain of Manners, the Court.

Thou art a bountiful and brave spring, and waterest all the noble plants of this Island. In thee the whole kingdom dresseth itself, and is ambitious to use thee as her glass. Beware then thou render men's figures truly, and teach them no less to hate their deformities, than to love their forms: for to grace there should come reverence; and no man can call that lovely which is not also venerable. It is not powdering, perfuming, and every day smelling of the tailor, that converteth to a beautiful object: but a mind shining through any suit, which needs no false light, either of riches or honours, to help it. Such shalt thou find some here, even in the reign of Cynthia—a Crites and an Arete. Now, under thy Phœbus, it will be thy province to make more, except thou desirest to have thy source mix with the spring of self-love, and so wilt draw upon thee as welcome a discovering of thy days, as was then made of her nights.—Thy servant, but not slave, BEN JONSON.

In *Cynthia's Revels* many of the characteristics of the Morality are preserved in their integrity. The names of the actors—Argurion, Philautia, Moria, etc.—indicate their allegorical nature; and the moral object of the "comical satire," as the author called his play, is clearly marked in the ridicule of the affected fashions of Court conversation which had been cultivated since the appearance of *Euphues*. There was, however, a strong personal

[1] *Every Man out of his Humour*, Act. v. Sc. 7

element in the drama, the natural result of the critical position which the poet had taken up in *Every Man out of his Humour.* In the character of Crites, as in that of Asper in the earlier play, Ben Jonson aggressively asserts his moral and literary principles, and he makes it sufficiently plain that in the persons of Hedon and Anaides he means to reflect on two enemies of his own. From the context in which these characters are satirised, it might have been inferred that they were courtiers; but Jonson's next play, *The Poetaster*, leaves it scarcely doubtful that the men aimed at were his rivals, the playwrights Marston and Dekker.

How this literary quarrel first arose is uncertain, but Jonson, in the apologetical dialogue appended to *The Poetaster*, says:—

> These, or such,
> Whether of malice or of ignorance,
> Or itch t' have me their adversary, I know not,
> Or all these mixt; but sure I am, three years
> They did provoke me with their petulant styles
> On every stage—

indicating that he was not the first aggressor; and indeed, as far as can be traced, the first provocation came from Marston, who, in his *Scourge of Villainie*, had ridiculed Jonson under the name of Torquatus for using such outlandish words as *real*, *intrinsicate*, and *Delfhicke*. Dekker, a somewhat meddlesome poet, seems to have joined Marston, and the pair carried on the war against the new dramatist by calling attention to his arrogance, his plagiarism from the Greeks and Latins, and his personal attacks on the soldiers, the lawyers, and the players. Jonson's reply was *The Poetaster*, produced in 1601. He probably felt that he must modify the violence of his self-assertion. He had made the actor who spoke the epilogue to *Cynthia's Revels* say:—

> I'll only speak what I have heard him say,
> By G—— 'tis good, and if you like 't you may;

and this had given just offence to the audience. The prologue to *The Poetaster* says:—

> Here now, put case our author should once more
> Swear that his play were good; he doth implore
> [illegible]
>
> And give his action that adulterate name
> Such full-blown vanity he more doth loathe
> Than base dejection: there's a mean 'twixt both,
> Which, with a constant firmness, he pursues,
> As one that knows the strength of his own Muse.

In *The Poetaster* Jonson, in the person of Horace, defends himself before Augustus against the attacks made on him by Marston and Dekker, who appear under the names of Crispinus and Demetrius. The satire is managed with great skill, each of Horace's accusers being made to ridicule himself in the form of the arraignment which he brings against the poet. The parody of Marston's absurd manner in *The Scourge of Villainie* and in the prologues to his plays is unmistakable:—

> Ramp up, my genius, be not retrograde,
> But boldly nominate a spade a spade.
> What, shall thy lubrical and glibbery Muse
> Live as she were defunct, like punk in stews?
> Alas! that were no modern consequence,
> To have cothurnal buskins frighted hence.
> No, teach thy Incubus to poetise,
> And throw abroad thy spurious snotteries
> Upon that puft-up lump of balmy froth,
> Or clumsy chilblained judgment; that with oath
> Magnificates his merit; and bespawls
> The conscious time with humorous foam, and brawls
> As if his organon of sense would crack
> The sinews of my patience. Break his back
> O poets, all and some! for now we list
> Of strenuous vengeance to clutch the fist.[1]

Dekker, who had apparently sneered at Jonson's "plagiarisms," is even more contemptuously handled. He is made to say, as Demetrius, and in the style of the Moralities:—

> I know the authors whence he has stole,
> And could trace him too, but that I understand them not
> full and whole.[2]

[1] *Poetaster*, Act v. Sc. I.

[2] *Ibid.* Act v Sc. I.

For the rest, the satire is made dramatic by laying the scene in ancient Rome, and representing on the stage a number of Horace's contemporaries, real or supposed, of whom by far the most diverting is Captain Tucca. When the play was published, the poet completed his defence by a translation of Horace's Satire i. Lib. 2 (afterwards imitated by Pope), which showed the exactness of the literary parallel, and by an *Apologetical Dialogue*, in which he dwelt, more directly than was possible in the play, on the justice of his own cause.[1] The effectiveness of his satire was felt even by his enemies. Dekker, indeed, attempted to prolong the struggle in his *Satiromastix*, produced in 1602, but his reply was feeble and inartistic. Marston more judiciously kept silence, and must have apologised to Jonson for his attacks, for in 1604 he dedicated *The Malcontent* to him as "his kind and affectionate friend." It also appears that Jonson co-operated with Chapman and Marston in writing the lively comedy *Eastward Hoe;* and when the two latter were put into prison, on account of a passage reflecting on the Scots, he thought it right to accompany them, as being partly responsible for the composition, though not for the offending words.

Though he issued from his quarrel with increased reputation, his experience had taught him prudence. He found, as Pope afterwards found, how easy it was for the enemies of a satirical poet to attach a meaning of particular malignity to his most ideal creations; how difficult for himself to persuade the public that such accusations were untrue. In dismissing the subject, he proclaimed his intention of breaking new dramatic ground:—

> Since the Comic Muse
> Hath proved so ominous to me, I will try
> If Tragedy hath a more kind aspect;
> Her favours in my next I will pursue.[2]

This promise was fulfilled in *Sejanus*, first acted in 1603. By some he is supposed in the first version of

[1] The *Apologetical Dialogue* was spoken on the stage, but was stopped "by authority."

[2] *Apologetical Dialogue*.

this play to have had the assistance of Shakespeare; the only evidence of the fact, however, being his own statement when *Sejanus* was published in 1605:—

I would inform you that this book in all numbers is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage, wherein a second pen had good share; in place of which I have rather chosen to put weaker, and no doubt less pleasing, of mine own than to defraud so happy a genius of his right by my loathed usurpation.

Since the main design of the dramatist in *Sejanus* was to reproduce with learned fidelity historical fact, it is, as Gifford says, extremely improbable that Jonson should have sought the aid of Shakespeare; and I should imagine that the person referred to is likely to have been a kindred genius, George Chapman. However this may be, the tragedy was not successful. Jonson, dedicating it in 1616 to Lord Aubigny, says:—

If ever any ruin were so great as to survive, I think this be one I send you, *The Fall of Sejanus*. It is a poem that, if I well remember, in your lordship's sight, suffered no less violence from our people here, than the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome.

Some part of this hostility may have been due to factious opposition, and to Jonson's unpopularity with the players; but more must be ascribed to faultiness of conception in the play itself. *Sejanus* is a history of tragic misfortune, conceived in the spirit of *The Mirror for Magistrates*. But while the public in the theatre enjoyed the spectacle of their own history, as it was presented to them in such a tragedy as Shakespeare's *Richard III.*, *Sejanus* was to most of them nothing but a name; and the elaborate analysis of characters belonging to a different age, together with the long speeches of Tiberius to the Senate, though highly appreciated by the erudite few, was "caviare to the general." Even making allowance for its learned design, the genius of the moralist and the historian appeared in this drama to prevail too much over the art of the poet. The introduction of the

Nuntius and other persons to relate the fate of the children of Sejanus after his own fall, tolerable perhaps in an interlude like Bale's *Kynge Johan*, is felt to be without excuse in a tragedy pretending to be regular.

Jonson was not dismayed by the failure of *Sejanus*. He knew that he had established for himself a strong position on the stage, and this was rendered still more secure by the favour with which he was regarded by the Court. James I. was qualified to appreciate his learning: the Queen delighted to witness, and sometimes to take part in, the Masques which, on festal occasions, no other poet could prepare with equal eloquence and splendour. Backed by the taste of the nobility and the respect of the rising school of dramatists, headed by Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson, through the whole of James's reign, found himself in easy circumstances, and the tone of his criticism becomes proportionately less harsh and censorious. During this period were produced all his most successful comedies, *Volpone*, *The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil is an Ass*; and the comparatively rare occurrence in these of the Inductions by which he attempted, in his early and later days, to guide the judgment of the spectators, shows that he felt himself to be moving with the popular stream. Between 1616—the date of the production of the last-named play—and 1625 he seems to have written nothing for the public stage: when he returned to it, a new king was on the throne, and his own dramatic powers had begun to decline.

Volpone (produced in 1605) is perhaps the finest of Jonson's comedies; at any rate, it is the most successful in blending the spirit of the old Morality with the form of the Classic drama. It has a clear and forcible moral, namely, that selfish greed and cunning must necessarily in the end overreach itself. Volpone (the Fox), assisted by his parasite Mosca (the Fly), deludes a number of base flatterers—Voltore (the Vulture), Corbaccio (the Crow), and Corvino (the Raven)—with the belief that he is at the point of death, and that each of them is likely to be his

sole heir. In this hope the fortune-hunters consent to sacrifice to Volpone's caprice, one his self-respect, another the future prospects of his son, the third even the honour of his wife; and when the Fox himself is brought into difficulties through his lust, they all conspire to extricate him by bearing false witness against two innocent persons, who would have been his victims. The latter are on the point of being condemned, when Volpone,—whose chief delight is in making fools of the knaves who expect to inherit from him,—with the co-operation of Mosca, spreads a report of his own death, and that the parasite is his heir. Disappointed in his hopes, one of the conspirators, Voltore, the advocate, confesses before the court the share he has had in the fraud; and when Volpone, who, in disguise, has been listening to him with dismay, tries to make Mosca contradict the rumour of his death, he finds that it is the interest of the latter to confirm it. Seeing that the game is up, he throws off his disguise and avows his deceit, thus depriving his accomplice of the fruits of his treachery. All the criminals are in this way exposed and punished together.

Traces of the allegorical spirit of the Morality remain in the names of the knavish actors, but the allegory is so finely blended with the action that the characters appear distinctly human. The plot is simple, and probable enough for the stage; though its unity is to some extent marred by the appearance of an absurd English traveller, Sir Politick Would-be, who is introduced merely for the purpose of exhibiting a "humour." The scene is laid in Venice, and the manners throughout are consistently "Italian," the action being thus skilfully relieved of the atmosphere of improbability which might have oppressed it, if a story so wild as that told by the conspirators had been represented as passing muster in an English court of justice. Jonson says, in the prologue to this remarkable play, that it was written in five weeks.

The plot of *The Silent Woman* (acted in 1609) is far more farcical. Morose, a selfish, unsocial old bachelor, has two main objects of dislike—noise and his nephew.

To get rid of the one, he has trained a barber to shave, and a servant to attend on him, in perfect silence; to spite the other, who is his heir expectant, he has resolved to marry. When the play opens, it appears that the barber has found for his patron a miraculous woman who knows how to hold her tongue: her, Morose is about to take as a wife, and for some reason the nephew, Sir Eugene Dauphine, appears to favour the arrangement, and is greatly vexed with one of his friends, who thinks to do him a service by interfering to prevent the marriage. Fortunately for Dauphine, the sole result of the intervention of the friend is to make Morose eager for the completion of the marriage; the barber, who is now seen to be in the nephew's pay, is sent to fetch a parson, and the ceremony is completed. Hardly has she become Morose's wife, when Epicœne shows herself in her true colours, and by her clamours and amazonian impudence begins to make her husband's life a burden to him. Morose is now eager to escape from the trap into which he has been led, and Dauphine's friends (all of whom believe that the marriage is valid and final) amuse themselves at the uncle's expense, by introducing the barber and another of their company, disguised as a divine and a canon lawyer, to consider the position. After the unfortunate man has been deafened by the noise of the disputants, without finding any prospect of relief, Dauphine offers to provide a means of escape, on condition that Morose will make suitable provision for him in the present and the future. The latter, who is ready in his despair to agree to anything, consents, upon which Dauphine causes Epicœne to throw off her peruke and other disguises, and shows that his uncle has married a boy.

The character of Morose, with the misfortune of his marriage, is borrowed from the Greek sophist Libanius,[1] but the whole contrivance of the plot, with its extremely artfully managed *dénouement*, is Jonson's, who has also ingeniously combined with the main action several underplots ridiculing the "humours" of the day.

[1] Gifford's edition of Ben Jonson, vol. iii. p. 500.

In the *Alchemist* (1610) the comic subject is furnished by one of the prevailing follies of the age. The craze for the transmutation of metals, which had been ridiculed by so early an author as Chaucer,[1] reached its height in the sixteenth century, when Paracelsus spread his impostures all over Europe, and was followed by such successful cheats as Dee and Kelly, whose arts, with the books of Lilly, Cardan, Anthony, and others, had helped to influence the covetous imagination of mankind. The plot of Jonson's play is of the simplest. Lovewit, a householder, has fled from London in fear of the plague, leaving his house under the charge of his servant Face, who allies himself with Subtle the Alchemist, and Dol Common, a woman of the town, to cheat as many dupes as possible in his master's absence. The play is taken up with a representation of the quarrels of the three rogues among themselves, and with the various devices by which they contrive to humour the credulity of their victims. The solution of the situation is provided by the return of Lovewit, with whom Face makes his peace by betraying his two confederates. In no other of his plays has Jonson so richly displayed his vast learning, or so happily woven into the texture of the plot the portraiture of particular characters. The reverend gravity of Subtle, the swelling flood of Epicure Mammon's sensual imagination, which sweeps away even the restraints imposed by his almost equally boundless greed, are represented with splendid power; and the fineness of Jonson's observation particularly displays itself in the nicety with which he discriminates between different kinds of fanaticism, manifested in one direction by the zeal of Ananias, in the other by the casuistry of Tribulation Wholesome.

In 1611 Jonson again attempted the pathos of tragedy. He seems himself to have thought his *Catiline* superior to *Sejanus*, for, in dedicating it to Lord Pembroke, he says: "It is the first of this race that ever I dedicated to any person; and had I not thought it the best, it should have been taught a less ambition." Con-

[1] See *Canterbury Tales*, "Canon's Yeoman's Tale."

To get rid of the one, he has trained a barber to shave, and a servant to attend on him, in perfect silence; to spite the other, who is his heir expectant, he has resolved to marry. When the play opens, it appears that the barber has found for his patron a miraculous woman who knows how to hold her tongue: her, Morose is about to take as a wife, and for some reason the nephew, Sir Eugene Dauphine, appears to favour the arrangement, and is greatly vexed with one of his friends, who thinks to do him a service by interfering to prevent the marriage. Fortunately for Dauphine, the sole result of the intervention of the friend is to make Morose eager for the completion of the marriage; the barber, who is now seen to be in the nephew's pay, is sent to fetch a parson, and the ceremony is completed. Hardly has she become Morose's wife, when Epicœne shows herself in her true colours, and by her clamours and amazonian impudence begins to make her husband's life a burden to him. Morose is now eager to escape from the trap into which he has been led, and Dauphine's friends (all of whom believe that the marriage is valid and final) amuse themselves at the uncle's expense, by introducing the barber and another of their company, disguised as a divine and a canon lawyer, to consider the position. After the unfortunate man has been deafened by the noise of the disputants, without finding any prospect of relief, Dauphine offers to provide a means of escape, on condition that Morose will make suitable provision for him in the present and the future. The latter, who is ready in his despair to agree to anything, consents, upon which Dauphine causes Epicœne to throw off her peruke and other disguises, and shows that his uncle has married a boy.

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[1] Gifford's edition of Ben Jonson, vol. iii. p. 500.

structed on the same principles as *Sejanus*, with a constant eye to the facts of history, and with rhetorical speeches of excessive length, the tragedy, like its predecessor, failed to secure the favour of the public.

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> BOOK. Your judgment, rascal! for what? sweeping the stage, or gathering up the broken apples for the bears within? Away, rogue; it's come to a fine degree in these spectacles when such a youth as you pretend to a judgment. [*Exit Stage-keeper.*] And yet he may i' the most of this matter i' faith: for the author has writ it just to his meridian, and the scale of the grounded judgments here, his playfellows in wit.

The play has no unity of action: it is impossible to say whether the catastrophe is mainly concerned with the discomfiture of the gull, Bartholomew Cokes, the fussy justice, Adam Overdo, or the silly proctor, John Littlewit. It is simply a series of farcical scenes imitated from real life. Nevertheless, from beginning to end there is an unflagging display of bustle and vivacity; and between the scolding of the fat pig-woman, Ursula, the knavish tricks of the pickpocket, Edgeworth, the gluttony, hypocrisy, and casuistry of Zeal-of-the-land Busy, the comedy, as a *genre* picture of low life, is unrivalled. It gave equal pleasure to the people and the Court, being acted first at the Hope Theatre, by the servants of the Lady Elizabeth, daughter of James I., and being dedicated to the King. After the Restoration it was constantly revived at the demand of the public, which vastly enjoyed the ridicule of the Puritans; while the character of the grown-up schoolboy, Cokes, was a special favourite with Charles II.

The poet, in this play, reached the zenith of his powers, and even in 1616 *The Devil is an Ass* shows that the period of decline had begun. The conception of the comedy, and the opening scene, in which Pug, the lesser devil, asks from his master leave of absence to exhibit his powers on earth, are admirable, but the execution is disappointing. Pug shows no specially diabolical qualities, and the action mainly exposes the tricks of projectors and pretended demoniacs, with which his mission has no concern. It is difficult therefore to see how the title of the play is justified, since it appears, from the beginning, that the hero is but a dull member of his fraternity. The most interesting feature of the play is the frequent reference in it to the old Moralities, showing how strongly Jonson was influenced by the spirit of the ancient English drama. He may, as is generally supposed, have borrowed his leading idea from the *Belphagor* of Machiavelli; but it is to be observed that Dekker, in his *Bellman* (1608), had already acclimatised the plot of the Italian play, by bringing up a minor devil to view the iniquities of London.

For the next nine years Jonson, though he prepared Masques for the Court, wrote nothing for the public stage. In 1618 he was made Poet Laureate, and in the summer of the same year paid his celebrated visit to Drummond of Hawthornden. Returning to England in the May of the following year, he spent some time at Oxford as the guest of Dr. Corbet, senior student of Christ Church, and received from the University the degree of M A. Perhaps James, with whom he was in high favour, claimed his services for the entertainment of the Court. We know that in 1621 the King, by letters-patent, granted him the reversion to the Mastership of the Revels, and was anxious to knight him, but Jonson declined the honour. In any case, he made no attempt to produce a fresh play till after James's death on 27th March 1625. He then wrote *The Staple of News*. The purpose of this comedy may be gathered from the following notice which the poet himself, when

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the play was printed, prefixed to the third act, which had given offence:—

To the Reader.

In this following act the office is opened, and shown to the Prodigal and his Princess Pecunia, wherein the allegory and purpose of the author hath hitherto been wholly mistaken, and so sinister an interpretation been made, as if the souls of most of the spectators had lived in the eyes and ears of these ridiculous gossips that tattle between the acts. But he prays you thus to mend it. To consider the news here vented to be none of his news, or any reasonable man's; but news made like the time's news (a weekly cheat to draw money); and could not be fitter reprehended than in raising this ridiculous office of the Staple, wherein the age may see her own folly, or hunger and thirst after published pamphlets or news, set out every Saturday, but made all at home, and no syllable of truth in them: than which there cannot be a greater disease in nature, or a fouler scorn put upon the times. And so apprehending it, you shall do the author and your own judgment a courtesy, and perceive the trick of alluring money to the office, and there cozening the people. If you have the truth, rest quiet, and consider that—

Ficta, voluptatis causa, sunt proxima veris.

In *The Staple of News* Jonson blends his early and middle manner—represented respectively in *Every Man out of his Humour* and *The Alchemist*—and takes for his direct model the *Plutus* of Aristophanes, satirising not only the public craving for news, which was indicated by the growing multitude of daily journals, but the greedy and money-making spirit with which that passion was closely connected. The reappearance of the Induction, and of the allegorical personages who criticise the development of the action, shows that the poet was aware of a change in the public taste, not altogether favourable to his own dramatic practice. He was, indeed, falling himself into "the sear, the yellow leaf." Palsy and poverty were growing upon him, and he had made himself numerous enemies. The latter rose against him with irrepressible malignity when, about five years later, he produced his *New Inn*, which was acted on 19th January 1629-30, but so ill received that it was not heard

to a conclusion. It was not written in Jonson's usual manner, and seems to me to have been inspired by Fletcher's *Beggars' Bush*, as though the poet was trying to adapt himself to the change in the public taste While the main plot is marked by all the improbability of the Spanish style, the humours of low life represented in it want the freshness and vivacity which enliven the dialogue of Fletcher's beggars There are some very fine and elevated passages of reflection on love and honour in the third and fourth acts, but these are not sufficient to atone for the want of verisimilitude in the action and characters: the play was condemned on its merits. Jonson, however, always too much inclined to believe in his own infallibility, could not bring himself to accept the verdict He seems, indeed, to have anticipated something of what actually happened, for in his epilogue (which was probably never spoken) he says pathetically:—

> Plays in themselves have neither hopes nor fears,
> Their fate is only in the hearers' ears:
> If you expect more than you had to-night,
> The maker is sick and sad. But do him right;
> He meant to please you. for he sent things fit
> In all the numbers, both of sense and wit,
> If they have not miscarried! if they have,
> All that his faint and faltering tongue doth crave
> Is that you not impute it to his brain.
> That's yet unhurt, although, set round with pain,
> It cannot hold out long: all strength must yield;
> Yet judgment would the last be in the field
> With the true poet.

But in fact he was not so submissive, and his resentment against the public blazed out in the famous *Ode to Himself* beginning "Come leave the loathed stage." The King, touched with compassion for the old poet's misfortune, sent him a present of a hundred pounds, and, a little later, in answer to his petition, increased his salary as Poet Laureate from a hundred marks to as many pounds, adding to it the tierce of wine which was afterwards continued to his successors in the office. Jonson was, however, unfortunate enough, within a very short time, to quarrel

with Inigo Jones, who had hitherto been his partner in preparing the Royal Masques, and whose influence at Court was sufficient to prevent his being employed on this business in the following year, when his place was supplied by Aurelian Townshend. He also lost the post of Chronologer to the City of London, for which he had been paid yearly one hundred nobles.

Owing, perhaps, to this diminution in his income he was unable to adhere to his resolution of writing no more for the stage. In 1632 he returned to his own dramatic manner in *The Magnetic Lady*, the title of which play he explained as follows in an induction characterised by his usual self-assertion: "The author, beginning his studies of this kind with *Every Man in his Humour*, and after *Every Man out of his Humour*, and since continuing in all his plays, especially those of the comic thread, whereof *The New Inn* was the last, some recent humours still or manners of men, that went along with the times; finding himself now near the close or shutting up of his circle, hath fancied to himself in idea this *Magnetic Mistress*: a lady, a brave, bountiful housekeeper, and a virtuous widow, who, having a young niece ripe for a man and marriageable, he makes that his centre attractive, to draw thither a diversity of guests, all persons of different humours, to make up his perimeter. And this he hath called *Humours Reconciled*." What success the comedy met with is uncertain. Langbaine calls it "an excellent play," but adds that "in the poet's days it found some enemies." Among these was Milton's tutor, Alexander Gill, who wrote a violent copy of verses against the play, in which he says:—

> Foh how it stinks, what general offence
> Gives thy profaneness and gross impudence!
> O how thy friend Nat Butter gan to melt
> And Inigo with laughter then grew fat,
> That there was nothing worth the laughing at.[1]

There is no doubt that "general offence" was given by the profanity of the actors in the play, who introduced

[1] For another mention of Gill, see vol iii. pp. 379-380.

into it so many oaths of their own that they were censured by the High Commission Court: an interference of authority which caused the Registrar of Plays to scrutinise with severity the language of all plays submitted to him, and a noticeable difference to be made in the verbal decency of the comedies produced within the decade preceding the outbreak of the Civil War. Jonson, however, was acquitted of all blame on the score of profanity. Nor must it be inferred from Gill's invective that *The Magnetic Lady* was a failure. Dryden speaks of all the plays written in Jonson's last years as "dotages"; and it must be admitted that this comedy scarcely deserves to be regarded, either in point of action, character, or dialogue, as a worthy close to the celebrated series of "Humours." Worse plays, however, have succeeded, and the audiences of the time may have been satisfied with a species of entertainment that does not now seem very satisfying. The same may be said of *The Tale of a Tub*, licensed for acting at the Blackfriars Theatre 7th May 1633, in which the poet seems to have aimed at the same kind of effect that had proved so successful in *Bartholomew Fair*:—

> No state affairs, nor any politic club
> Pretend we in our tale here of a tub;
> But acts of clowns and constables to-day
> Stuff out the scene of our ridiculous play.
> A cooper's wit, or some such busy spark,
> Illumining the high constable, and his clerk,
> And all the neighbourhood, from old records
> Of antique proverbs, drawn from Whitsun-lords,
> And their authorities, at Cakes and Ales,
> With country precedents and old wives' tales,
> We bring you now, to show what different things
> The cotes of clowns are from the courts of kings.[1]

The play represents the farcical adventures of a bride who, on her wedding-day, is carried off in turn by a number of suitors who are all anxious to marry her, and who each endeavour to outwit the other in a manner somewhat resembling the complication in *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. All the *dramatis personæ* are of the rustic

[1] Prologue to *A Tale of a Tub*.

order, and some of them speak in dialect. The comedy was performed before the King, whom the poet perhaps hoped to amuse, as he suggests in his prologue, with an imitation of manners and language radically opposed to those of the Court. If such was his expectation, the design was one which might have commended itself to a lover of novelty and curiosity like James I., but which would scarely have been congenial with the melancholy humour of his son.

The Tale of a Tub was Jonson's last work for the public stage, and, with the exception of two Masques,—each entitled *Love's Welcome*, written, one in 1633 the other in 1634, for the Earl of Newcastle, on the occasions of " King's visits to Welbeck and Bolsover,—the last of dramatic compositions. He died on the 6th August 16 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, with an inscri tion on the stone over his grave, "*O rare Ben Jonson!*"

The dramas of Ben Jonson, like those of Shakespeare are inspired by a general view of human life and action; but the leading principles of the two poets are of a very different, and in many respects of a mutually antagonistic character. Shakespeare was, partially at least, in sympathy with some of the ideas which had been introduced into England from Italy: Jonson was vehemently opposed to them. Beginning his poetic career as a follower of Marlowe, Shakespeare learned from that master the dramatic value of Machiavelli's conception of *Virtù*,—the power of the free, resolute, unswerving exertion of the human will,—and though reflection and experience taught him the limits of this philosophy, though he came to realise the power of conscience—whether determined by the Catholic or the reformed aspect of the Christian religion—as a restraining influence on human conduct, his primary conception of tragic or comic action was from first to last based on stories reflecting the spirit of th Italian Renaissance. Ben Jonson, on the contrary, dre his ethical notions mainly from the teaching of Mediæval Catholicism. Bred as a member of the Church of England, he had been converted, while in prison, to the doctrines of the Roman Church; and though about the year

1606 he publicly proclaimed the energy of the feeling which prompted him to rejoin the Anglican communion, the character of his dramas is determined by the didactic aims which the Catholic Church had from early days sought to promote by means of the Miracle Plays and Moralities. His principles are therefore naturally and inevitably opposed to the view of life and man's nature presented by dramatists of the school of Marlowe. By genius a satirist and a moralist, rather than a poetic creator, his mode of thought brought him into antagonism with the impulse of lyrical sentiment which inspired the early Romantic movement. Bearing in mind this initial bent of his genius, we may readily trace his dramatic development in (1) his tragedies, (2) his comedies, and (3) his Masques

1. Of his tragedies little need be added to what has been already said in the review of his life. His moral and didactic conception of the drama led him to regard tragedy from the mediæval point of view, as a vehicle for the lesson to be learned from the downfall of geat men, and particularly great sinners. He concludes his *Sejanus* as follows :—

> Let this example move the insolent man
> Not to grow proud and careless of the gods.
> It is an odious wisdom to blaspheme,
> Much more to slighten or deny their powers :
> For whom the morning saw so great and high,
> Thus low and little 'fore the even doth lie.

The same moral is repeated in *Catiline*, but here it is enforced, in Seneca's manner, by means of a chorus at the close of each of the first four acts. When Jonson has selected his moral example, he does not, like Shakespeare and the early Romantic school, conceive it lyrically, but contemplates it from without, or rather strives, by means of his minute historical learning, to enter into the motives of the different actors, and to present the facts to the spectators as nearly as possible after the manner in which they may be conceived to have actually happened. This method, suited to history rather than to poetry, cut him off from contact with the imagination of the specta-

tors, and, by depriving his historical tragedies of that universal human, though modern, atmosphere in which a play like *Julius Cæsar* or *Antony and Cleopatra* moves, gave them an unsympathetic and over-didactic air which roused resentment in the audience. His lack of lyric enthusiasm, with the coldness of conception which is the result of it, is quite sufficient to account for Jonson's failure to please in the paths of tragedy.

2. In the sphere of comedy the case is far different: here most of his compositions are full of life, energy, and character. Yet even in comedy our appreciation of his merits must depend on our willingness to enter imaginatively into his aims, and to place ourselves in as close sympathy as possible with the audiences for whom he immediately wrote. Though his plays breathe the spirit of humanity, what is universal in them is presented in such a local and particular garb, that it can only be discerned by a certain effort of the intellect. As we have already seen, his aim was to present—

> Deeds, and language, such as men do use,
> And persons, such as Comedy would choose,
> When she would show an image of the times,
> And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

In this definite attempt to blend instruction with amusement (*utile dulci*), we recognise the spirit of the old Morality. Equally apparent is the influence of the forms employed by the Morality-maker, in the allegory and abstraction, mixed with the closest imitation of real objects, which characterise so many of Jonson's comedies. It shows itself in the allegorical names of *Every Man out of his Humour*, Sordido, Fungoso, Asper, Macilente, Shift, Fastidious Brisk, etc., no less than in the direct allegory—the Fountain of Self-Love—and the abstract personages—Phantaste, Argurion, Arete, Philautia—of *Cynthia's Revels*. The plot of *The Devil is an Ass* is largely suggested by the practice of the old stage and its indispensable personages the Devil and the Vice; constant references, moreover, to this tradition throughout the play show how deeply it had

entered into Jonson's conception of comedy. Though in Jonson's three great comedies—*Volpone*, *The Silent Woman*, and *The Alchemist*—the form of the interlude temporarily disappears, and though the element of abstraction seems to be almost eliminated from *Bartholomew Fair*, this latter play breathes, in its realistic imitation, precisely the same spirit as *Hick Scorner* and *The Three Ladies of London;* and the allegorical form re-emerges again in *The Staple of News*, where the Lady Pecunia (a lineal descendant of Lady Mede), Mortgage, Statute, Band, and Wax, take part in the action of the play, and Mirth, Taste, Expectation, and Censure serve as interpreters of its meaning.

With the Mediæval tradition Jonson skilfully blended the form of the Classic comic drama, leaning to the manner sometimes of the Middle, and sometimes of the New Comedy at Athens. His general conception is vividly illustrated by a passage in the Induction to *Every Man out of his Humour:*—

MITIS I travail with another objection, signior, which I fear will be enforced against the author ere I can be delivered of it.

CORDATUS What is it?

MIT. That the argument of his comedy might have been of some other nature, as of a duke to be in love with a countess, and that countess to be in love with the duke's son, and the son to love the lady's waiting-maid; some such cross-wooing, with a clown to their serving-man, better than to be thus near and familiarly allied to the time.

CORD. You say well, but I would fain hear one of these outworn judgments define once, *Quid sit comœdia?* If he cannot, let him content himself with Cicero's definition, till he have strength to propose to himself a better, who would have a comedy to be *imitatio vitæ, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis;* a thing pleasant and ridiculous, and accommodated to the correction of manners.

He thus opposes to the idea of the Romantic comedy, illustrated in *Twelfth Night*, the idea of the Classic comedy, defined by Cicero; in other words, while the Romantic dramatists sought to provoke laughter mainly by the accidents of fortune exhibited in *action*, Jonson threw all his efforts into the representation of incongruities of *character*. This principle is the source equally of his strength and weakness as a writer of comedy. As a

painter of individual comic characters in real life he is probably unequalled. To the finest faculty of observation he united the power of abstracting what was essential to the type, and reproducing it in an imaginative dramatic form. When his actors speak we are able at once to divine their true character: the pretentious solemnity of Bobadil, the impudent *bonhomie* of Tucca, the blind zeal of Ananias, the pious avarice of Tribulation Wholesome, the reforming hypocrisy of Busy, all express themselves precisely in the style and language required to make us believe in the reality of their existence. So powerful is the conception that fashions of vice or folly long extinct, Alchemy, Arcadianism, Euphuism, and forgotten institutions like Bartholemew Fair, live again in our imagination. We listen to the critical chatter of the spectators in the Hope or the Fortune theatres; we move among the shifting scenes of gossip or imposture in the middle aisle of old St. Paul's. Nor is the drama presented to us a mere dissolving view of obsolete knavery, such as is reflected in the comedies of Middleton, who wrote merely to amuse the spectators of the moment. The genuine moral indignation of Jonson made him seize on what was universal in the spirit of his age; and whether he is exposing the boundless lechery of Sir Epicure Mammon, or the petty quackeries of Cavalier Shift, some enduring form of human meanness reveals itself in all his characters through each particular and temporary disguise.

The delight which Jonson felt in comtemplating the abstract "humours" of individual character caused him to undervalue that external machinery of comedy by which inconsistencies of character are revealed through the freaks of fortune. Gifford, it is true, praises his plots. He says:—

In the plots of his comedies, which were constructed from his own materials, he is deserving of undisputed praise. Without violence, without indeed any visible effort, the various events of the story are so linked together that they have the appearance of accidental introduction; yet they all contribute to the main design, and support that just harmony which alone constitutes a perfect fable. Such, in fact, is the rigid accuracy of his plans,

that it requires a constant and almost painful attention to trace out their various bearings and dependencies. Nothing is left to chance: before he sat down to write he had evidently arranged every circumstance in his mind; preparations are made for incidents which do not immediately occur, and hints are dropped which can only be comprehended at the unravelling of the piece.[1]

This is an excellent description of Jonson's abstract method of composition; but Gifford ought to have added that in no other existent type of comedy is the imagination of the audience so completely left out of account. In the New Comedy of Athens, the moral of the play, whatever it might be, was revealed entirely through the action, as afterwards in the plays of Molière. In the Old Comedy, indeed, the moral was more prominent; and probably the comic dramatist to whom Jonson is most nearly allied is Aristophanes. He resembled the Attic poet in his didactic aim, in the selection and the allegorical treatment of his subjects, in his conservative sympathies. He imitated, in his *Inductions*, Aristophanes' practice of directly addressing the spectators in the person of the chorus. His plays abound in recollections of Aristophanic situations; and one of them, *The Staple of News*, borrows its leading idea from the *Plutus*. But Aristophanes, however he might assert his didactic rights as a poet, never allowed himself to get out of touch with his audience. Audacious as was his conception of the sphere of comic action, it was suited to the bacchanalian revelry of the Dionysia; the allegorical chorus by which he enforces his moral was an established institution of the stage; the initial impossibility of his comic situations once granted, everything in the machinery of the plot appears consistent and probable, and contributes to the movement of the play. In Jonson's comedies, on the other hand, the action has a tendency to stand still, while the poet exhibits to us the "humour" at which he wishes us to laugh. *Every Man out of his Humour*, in particular, consists of a series of unconnected scenes, ridiculing various kinds of folly; and the contrivances of Macilente, the envious man, for bringing about

[1] Gifford's edition of Ben Jonson's *Works* (1816), vol. i [illegible]

the catastrophe by which each of the personages is cured of his humour, are devoid of all comic invention. In the same way, in *Bartholomew Fair*, one ridiculous episode of low life succeeds another without reference to the progress of the action as a whole. Even in *Volpone*—on the whole, the best constructed of Jonson's comedies—the poet does not succeed in producing that convinced feeling of probability which enables the spectator or reader to live for the moment in the ideal situation: there is, for example, nothing in the opening of the play to raise an expectation of the scene between Volpone and Celia, which is the climax of the "complication"; attention is concentrated on the characters of the Fox, his parasite, and his different flatterers; and the story with which the conspirators endeavour to hoodwink justice is such as could scarcely have deceived the most gullible of mankind. While the secret which leads to the catastrophe in *The Silent Woman* is admirably preserved, the movement of that play is retarded by the introduction of a number of characters not essential to the plot; and the scenes between Captain Otter and his wife, between the two boasting cowards La Foole and Daw, and between Dauphine and the Ladies Collegiate, are in no way connected with the fortunes of Morose. The plot of *The Alchemist* is of so slender a kind that the incidents can scarcely be said to have any complication; on the other hand, the *dénouement*, whereby the cheating Face escapes from the difficulties of his situation without any punishment, is, from Jonson's moral point of view, hardly satisfactory.

3. While Jonson's conception of tragedy and comedy was thus opposed to the Romantic principle which blended the mediæval lyric spirit with the mediæval epic forms, there was one side of his genius which was entirely Romantic. He was in a special sense the poet of the Court. The Court, as the progress of this history has, I trust, made abundantly clear, had become the last home for the forms and traditions of the dying spirit of chivalry. Long after knighthood had lost its *raison d'être* as a

military instrument, the exercises and amusements of the knight were regarded as essential to the training of the courtier; and in the tournament and the chase the feudal nobility preserved an image of the primitive customs of barbaric warfare. Closely associated with these knightly institutions, the genius of the Middle Ages added the pomp of allegory to the exhibition of arms and horsemanship. Reference, for example, has already been made to the allegorical device with which Sidney and his companions entertained the Duke of Alençon at the tournament in Whitehall in 1581; and the following testimony of a complete gentleman of the period, himself inclined to the Puritanic school of thought, will show how much of the spirit of the Middle Ages survived in the Court of Elizabeth:—

> The first that I shall propose to you is the noble exercise of riding the great horse. A knight on horseback is one of the goodliest sights of the world. Methinks I see Sir James Scudamore, your thrice noble grandfather (a brave man at arms at tilt and barriers), after the voyage of Cales and the Canary Islands (wherein he performed very remarkable and signal service under the Earl of Essex), enter the tilt-yard in a handsome equipage, all in complete armour, embellished with plumes, his beaver close, mounted upon a very high bounding horse (I have seen the shoes of his horse glister above the heads of the people), and, when he came to the encounter or shock, break as many spears as the most; Her Majesty Q. Elizabeth, with a train of ladies, like the stars in the firmament, and the whole Court looking upon him with a very gracious aspect.[1]

In the Court of James the chivalric spirit greatly declined. The King himself, timid and peace-loving, had nothing of the magnanimous temper which, with all her defects, raised the character of the great Gloriana: Somerset and Buckingham were but petty successors of men like Sidney, Raleigh, and Essex. But both King and Queen, in different ways, had a genuine love of art and learning, and under their patronage the external forms of the chivalrous shows were cultivated with equal splendour and refine-

[1] *Institution of a Gentleman*, by William Higford, Harleian Miscellany, vol ix. p. 595.

ment. Out of this taste arose the great development of the Masque. Painting, architecture, and poetry, represented by the alliance between Inigo Jones and Jonson, for a long time harmoniously combined their powers to produce an entertainment worthy of the royal and erudite spectators. Jonson here found himself in his own element. Seizing on the various picturesque forms symbolical of mediæval life,—chivalry, allegory, pastoralism,—he enriched them with the treasures of his vast classical learning. Sometimes he briefly illustrates an abstract moral theme by the action of allegorical figures, as in the Masques *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly; Pleasure Reconciled with Virtue; Love Restored.* More often the Masque is designed to enliven some festival, as *The Masque of Christmas*, presented at Court in 1616; *Time Vindicated*, an entertainment for Twelfth Night, 1623; *Prince Henry's Barriers*, written for the tournament held to celebrate the creation of Henry Prince of Wales in 1610. But whatever was the occasion, Jonson never failed to improve, with an inexhaustible fund of invention, on the example set him with such conspicuous success by Peele in his *Arraignment of Paris.* The enjoyment of the spectators in witnessing these spectacles arose from guessing the meaning of the allegory of the Masque. While the eye feasted on the sumptuous splendour of the decorations, the mind derived pleasure and instruction from the study of details, each of which was supported by the precedents of ancient art and literature. A general idea of the character of Jonson's Masques and Anti-Masques may be obtained from the account he himself gives of *The Masque of Queens*, in which Anne of Denmark, with her ladies, played on 2nd February 1609:—

It increasing now to the third time of my being used in these services to Her Majesty's personal presentations with the ladies whom she pleaseth to honour; it was my first and special regard to see that the nobility of the invention should be answerable to the dignity of their persons. For which reason I chose the argument to be, *A celebration of honourable and true fame, bred out of virtue:* observing that rule of the best artist, to suffer no

object of delight to pass without his mixture of profit and example. And because Her Majesty (best knowing that a principal part of life in these spectacles lay in their variety) had commanded me to think of some dance or show that might precede hers, and have the place of a foil, or false masque; I was careful to decline, not only from others, but mine own steps in that kind, since the last year I had an anti-masque of boys; and therefore now devised that twelve women, in the habit of hags or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, etc., the opposites to good Fame, should fill that part; not as a masque, but as a spectacle of strangeness, producing multiplicity of gesture, and not inaptly sorting with the current and whole fall of the device.

His Majesty, then, being set, and the whole company in full expectation, the part of the scene which first presented itself was an ugly Hell; which, flaming beneath, smoked unto the top of the roof. And in respect all evils are morally said to come from hell; as also from that observation of Torrentius upon Horace's *Canidia, quæ tot instructa venenis, ex Orci faucibus profecta videri possit:* these witches, with a kind of hollow and infernal music, came forth from thence. First one, then two, and three, and more, till their number increased to eleven, all differently attired: some with rats on their heads, some on their shoulders; others with ointment pots at their girdles; all with spindles, timbrels, rattles, or other venefical instruments, making a confused noise, with strange gestures. The device of their attire was Master Jones's, with the invention and architecture of the whole scene and machine. Only I prescribed them their properties of vipers, snakes, bones, herbs, roots, and other ensigns of their magic, out of the authority of ancient and late writers, wherein the faults are mine, if there be any found; and for this cause I confess them.

Closely allied with the genius of the Masque is Jonson's pastoral comedy, *The Sad Shepherd;* a play in which he combines the spirit of the Italian pastoral, represented by Guarini's *Pastor Fido*, and the English sylvan legend of Robin Hood, and makes use of the superstitious rural belief in demonology and witchcraft for the development of his action. *The Sad Shepherd* has unfortunately come down to us only in a fragmentary form; but, even as a torso, Gifford only slightly exaggerates in saying of it that it "may not only be safely opposed to the most perfect of his early works, but to any similar performance

in any age or country." In the skill of the machinery, the consistency of the characters, and the beauty of its ideal sentiment, it is, in my judgment, little, if at all, inferior to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, while its exclusively pastoral character removes it from the danger of comparison with *Comus*. The following extract from this beautiful work (which perhaps owes something to the kindred genius of Peele) will serve to illustrate the rich vein of poetry in Ben Jonson, and the invention with which he could employ his learning for the purposes of his art. Alken, one of the shepherds, is describing the transformations of the old witch, Maudlin :—

> Within a gloomy dimble she doth dwell
> Down in a pit, o'ergrown with brakes and briars,
> Close by the ruins of a shaken abbey
> Torn with an earthquake down unto the ground,
> 'Mongst graves and grots, near an old charnel-house,
> Where you shall find her sitting in her form,
> As fearful and melancholic as that
> She is about ; with caterpillars' kells,
> And knotty cobwebs, rounded in with spells.
> Thence she steals forth to relief[1] in the fogs,
> And rotten mists, upon the fens and bogs,
> Down to the drowned lands of Lincolnshire ;
> To make ewes cast their lambs, swine eat their farrow,
> The housewives' tun not work, nor the milk churn !
> Writhe children's wrists, and suck their breath in sleep,
> Get vials of their blood ! and when the sea
> Casts up his slimy ooze, search for a weed
> To open locks with, and to rivet charms,
> Planted about her in the wicked feat
> Of all her mischiefs, which are manifold.
>
> JOHN. I wonder such a story could be told
> Of her dire deeds.
>
> GEORGE. I thought a witch's banks
> Had enclosed nothing but the merry pranks
> Of some old woman.
>
> SCARLET. Yes, her malice more.
>
> SCATHLOCK. As it would quickly appear had we the store
> Of his collects.

[1] This is the reading in all editions. *Quære*, "Revel.'

GEORGE. Ay, this gud learned man
Can speak her right.
SCARLET. He knows her shifts and haunts
ALKEN. And all her wiles and turns. The venomed plants
Wherewith she kills! where the sad mandrake grows,
Whose groves are deathful; the dead-numbing nightshade,
The stupifying hemlock, adder's tongue,
And martagan. the shrieks of luckless owls
[illegible]

That make a humming murmur as they fly!
There in the stocks of trees, white fays do dwell,
And span-long elves that dance about a pool,
With each a little changeling in their arms!
The airy spirits play with falling stars,
And mount the sphere of fire to kiss the moon!
While she sits reading by the glow-worm's light,
Or rotten wood, o'er which the worm hath crept,
The baneful schedule of her nocent charms,
And binding characters through which she wounds
Her puppets, the sigilla of her witchcraft.
All this I know, and I will find her for you,
And show you her sitting in her form; I'll lay
My hand upon her, make her throw her skut
Along her back, when she doth start before us.
But you must give her law · and you shall see her
Make twenty leaps and doubles; cross the paths
And then squat down beside us.

In a passage like this we see the natural opposition between the genius of Jonson and that of Shakespeare. The former has nothing of the lyrical creative imagination which gives

To airy nothings
A local habitation and a name.

His style, even in its most poetical form, lacks the exquisite and ideal lightness of the fairy language in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream.* Compare the poetry of *The Sad Shepherd* with the following, for example.—

TITANIA. Come, now a roundel and a fairy song;
Then, for the third part of a minute, hence;
Some to kill cankers in the musk-rose buds,

> Some war with rere-mice for their leathern wings,
> To make my small elves coats, and some keep back
> The clamorous owl that nightly hoots and wonders
> At our quaint spirits. Sing me now asleep:
> Then to your offices, and let me rest.

Here is the very essence of fairy life and being. Jonson, on the other hand, uses the pastoral and fairy form rather as the appropriate vehicle for some of the accumulated stores of his own vast learning.

And this difference of sentiment and style runs through each class of their work. Shakespeare, in his imagination, resembles an eagle sailing sublimely in dazzling sunlight to far horizons, where sea and sky seem to blend in the infinities of space. On the wings of music and metaphor, he rises into regions where—and this is especially the case in his *Sonnets* and his later plays—it is difficult to follow his flight. Jonson is like the trained falcon, that favourite companion in the Middle Ages of princes and nobles, keen of eye and sure in aim, often towering in air to strike at his quarry of vice and folly, of manners and character, but always well within the sphere of observation. His metrical language, aiming at a definite and precise object, is plain, strong, masculine. Though it is not wanting in images, the images are deliberately chosen as vehicles for ideas; it is seldom with him, as is so often the case with Shakespeare, that an idea is transformed into an image. The art with which rich stores of intellectual experience, obtained from tradition and literature, are brought to the illustration of a central thought is everywhere apparent.

Hence the vast influence which he exerted on contemporary style. "There was at this time in England," says Schlegel, in his excellent and generally judicious survey of the Elizabethan stage, "a school of dramatic art, a school of which Shakespeare was the invisible and too often unacknowledged head: Ben Jonson remained almost without successors."[1] This is the exact opposite of the truth. Shakespeare had no

[1] *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (Bohn, 1846), p. 474.

real successors. The lyrical and romantic impulse in society, of which his dramas are the expression, died rapidly out, so that men of the Jacobean period ceased to understand, by instinct and sympathy, the thoughts that had inspired the age of the Spanish Armada. Jonson's aims, on the other hand, were intelligible to all who had the power of thought: that is to say, to those who guided the course of taste. Some might resent his arrogance, others might dislike his dramatic principles, but all were forced to respect the sincerity of his purpose, the profundity of his learning, the definiteness of his art. Where he led the way a compact body of men of imagination and judgment followed, and laid down the road. Aided by the favour of the Court, and by the appreciation of Camden, Selden, and the more thoughtful of the aristocracy, Jonson erected a standard of dramatic taste before which the naive, instinctive criticism of the audiences which applauded *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* sullenly gave way. The influence of the Court had prevailed over that of the people, and the effects of the change disclose themselves in the construction of the dramas of Beaumont and Fletcher

CHAPTER XI

THE DRAMATIC TASTE OF THE COURT: BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER. INFLUENCE OF SPANISH ROMANCE ON THE ENGLISH POETIC DRAMA.

NOTHING is more curious and interesting in the history of the English poetic drama than the growing influence of the Court in determining the taste of the theatre. As I observed in a previous chapter, for some years after the Spanish Armada the enthusiasm of the popular part of the audience, as well as the genius of Shakespeare, prevented the courtiers from taking more than their fair share in dramatic criticism. As early as the year 1599, however, the evidence shows that the more fashionable spectators of plays were beginning to make their presence unpleasantly felt both by the dramatist and their neighbours in the theatre. The following very interesting passage describing the behaviour of the audience is found in Ben Jonson's *The Case is Altered*, a tragi-comedy exhibited in that year:—

VALENTINE. The sport is at a new play to observe the sway and variety of opinion that passeth it. A man shall have such a confused mixture of judgment poured out in the throng there, as ridiculous as laughter itself. One says he likes not the writing, another likes not the plot, another not the playing; and sometimes a fellow that comes not there past once in five years, at a parliament time, or so, will be as lief mired in censuring as the best, and swear by God's foot he would never stir his foot to see a hundred such as that is.

ONION. I must travel to see these things; I shall never think well of myself else.

JUNIPER. Fellow Onion, I'll bear thy charges, an thou wilt but pilgrimise it along with me to the land of Utopia.

SEBASTIAN. Why, but methinks such rooks as these should be ashamed to judge.

VALENTINE. Not a whit; the rankest stinkard of them all will take upon him as peremptory, as if he had been writ himself *in artibus magister.*

SEB. And do they stand to a popular censure for anything they present.

VAL. Ay, ever, ever; and the people generally are very acceptive, and apt to applaud any meritable work, but there are two sorts of persons that most commonly are infectious to a whole auditory.

BALTHASAR. What be they?

JUN. Ay, come let's know them.

ON. It were good they were noted.

VAL. Marry, one is the rude barbarous crew, a people that have no brains, and yet grounded judgments; these will hiss anything that mounts above their grounded capacities; but the other are worth the observation, i' faith.

OMNES. What be they, what be they?

VAL. Faith, a few capricious gallants.

JUN. Capricious! stay, that word's for me.

VAL. And they have taken such a habit of dislike in all things that they will approve nothing, be it never so conceited or elaborate; but sit dispersed, making faces, and spitting, wagging their upright ears, and cry filthy! filthy! simply uttering their own condition, and using their wryed countenances, instead of a vice, to turn the good aspects of all that shall sit near them from what they behold [1]

Nothing here shows in what part of the theatre the Court gallants gave expression to these feelings of disgust. But in 1600 they were beginning to mount upon the stage itself, as Jonson again testifies in the Induction to his *Cynthia's Revels*:—

3RD CHILD. Now, sir, suppose I am one of your genteel auditors, that are come in, having paid my money at the door, with much ado, and here I take my place and sit down. I have my three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin [*At the breaks he takes his tobacco*] By this light, I wonder that any man is so mad, to come to see these rascally tits play here. They do act like so many wrens or pismires—not the fifth part of a good face among them all.—And then their music is abominable—able to stretch a man's ears worse than ten—pillories and their ditties—most lamentable things, like the pitiful fellows that make them—poets. By

[1] *The Case is Altered,* Act ii. Sc. 4.

this vapour, an 'twere not for tobacco—I think—the very stench of them would poison me, I should not dare to come in at their gates.—A man were better visit fifteen jails—or a dozen or two of hospitals—than once adventure to come near them. How is't? Well?

1ST CHILD. Excellent; give me my cloak.

3RD CHILD. Stay, you shall see me do another now more sober or better gathered gallant; that is, as it may be thought, some friend, or well-wisher to the house: and here I enter.

1ST CHILD. What, upon the stage, too?

2ND CHILD. Yes, and I step forth like one of the children and ask you, Would you have a stool, sir?

3RD CHILD. A stool, boy!

2ND CHILD. Ay, sir, if you'll give me sixpence I'll fetch you one.

3RD CHILD. For what, I pray thee? What shall I do with it?

2ND CHILD. O lord, sir, will you betray your ignorance so much? Why, throne yourself in state on the stage as other gentlemen use.[1]

Finally in 1609 we have Dekker's lively description in *The Gull's Hornbook* of the height to which the courtiers in the theatre carried their contempt for public opinion:—

Whether therefore the gatherers of the public or private playhouse stand to receive the afternoon's rent, let our gallant (having paid it) presently advance himself up to the throne of the stage—I mean not into the Lord's room (which is now but the stage's suburbs). No, those boxes, by the iniquity of custom, conspiracy of waiting women, and gentlemen ushers, that there sweat together, and the covetousness of sharers, are contemptibly thrust into the rear, and much new satire is there daubed by being smothered to death in darkness. But on the very rushes, where the comedy is to dance, yea, and under the state of Cambyses himself, must our feathered Estridge, like a piece of ordnance, be planted valiantly (because impudently) beating down the mews and hisses of the opposed rascality.[2]

From this it appears that the boxes near the stage were originally the "rooms" for the aristocracy, but that these had been forsaken for seats upon the stage itself; and Dekker goes on to describe the airs which his gallant should give himself before the play begins, exhibiting the splendour of his dress to the gaping crowd in the pit, ex-

[1] *Cynthia's Revels*, Induction.

[2] *Dekker's Non-Dramatic Works* (Grosart), vol. ii. pp. 247-8.

amining the boy actors, gambling and tearing the cards to pieces on the stage. Such outrages on all propriety were probably exceptional; but the fact that they should have been possible shows how great must have been the influence exerted on taste by the wealthier and more cultivated portion of the audience, which sat nearest to the players, and which the latter were naturally most anxious to please. For amongst these were not only such ill-bred mountebanks as Dekker's Gull, but (as we see from *Cynthia's Revels*) "the more sober, or better gathered gallant, the friend of the house," who really loved the drama, and was anxious to study the merits of the performance from the most advantageous point of view. It was the taste of reflecting judges like these, which, prevailing over the raw instinctive enthusiasm of the multitude in the pit, gradually changed the character of the English drama.

Something of the same kind had previously been witnessed on the Attic stage. To the modern reader it seems strange that Aristotle in the *Poetics*, with the *Agamemnon*, the *Chœphoræ*, and the *Eumenides* of Æschylus before him, should have pronounced Euripides to be the most tragic of poets[1] Considered, however, in the light of history, the judgment is perfectly intelligible. When the *Poetics* were written the Attic drama was still a living institution; but the life of the performance had passed from the chorus into the plot of the play: the lyrical impulse was almost extinct. What Aristotle chiefly valued, as a spectator, was ingenious manipulation of incident and character, in which (whatever faults the philosopher was inclined to find in him) Euripides excelled. Beaumont and Fletcher were, in the history of the English drama, to Shakespeare what Euripides, on the stage of Athens, was to Æschylus.

When Beaumont and Fletcher became the chief favourites of the English theatre, the passion for the drama was at its height. After the theatres were closed by order of Parliament, their collected plays were, for the first time, printed, and the folio edition of 1647 contains

[1] Aristotle's *Poetics*, chap. xiii. 6.

a number of commendatory poems from those who had witnessed the performance of them on the stage. The tone of these poetical tributes is full of admiration and regret. In some of the writers this expresses itself in vague hyperbole. Homer, says one enthusiast, if he were to read Fletcher's *King and No King*, would re-cast the character of Achilles, taking Arbaces for his model; Virgil would confess that his Dido could not compare with the Aspatia of *The Maid's Tragedy*.[1] A second proclaims that Plautus and Aristophanes are "scurril wits and buffons" in comparison with Beaumont, and that—

> When thou'rt of Chaucer's standing in the tomb,
> Thou shalt not share, but take up all his room.[2]

But others are more discriminating, and give reasons for their taste. William Cartwright, a very ingenious poet, explains why Fletcher is to be preferred to Shakespeare:—

> Shakespeare to thee was dull, whose best jest lies
> I' the ladies' questions and the fools' replies;
> Old fashioned wit which walked from town to town
> In turned hose, which our fathers called the clown,
> Whose wit our nice times would obsceneness call,
> And which makes bawdry pass for comical:
> Nature was all his art; thy vein was free
> As his, but without his scurrility;
> From whom mirth came unforced, no jest perplexed,
> But without labour, clean, chaste, and unvexed.[3]

Sir John Birkenhead, a sensible critic, commends Fletcher in the same spirit, for departing from the conceit and bombast of the stage style in the previous generation.[4]

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[1] See Commendatory Poem by H. Howard, Dyce's edition of *Beaumont and Fletcher*, vol. i. p. 14.

[2] *Ibid.* by John Earle, vol. i. pp. 37-38.

[3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 45.

[4] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 50:—

> Such boisterous trifles thy muse would not brook
> Save when she'd show how scurvily they look.
> No savage metaphors, things rudely great,
> Thou dost display, not butcher, a conceit;
> Thy nerves have beauty which invades and charms—
> Looks like a princess harnessed in bright arms.
> Nor art thou loud and cloudy: those that do
> Thunder so much, do't without lightning too,
> Tearing themselves, and almost split their brain
> To render harsh what thou speak'st free and clean:
> Such gloomy sense may pass for high and proud,
> But true-born wit still flies above the cloud;
> Thou knew'st 'twas impotence what they called height,
> Who blusters strong i' the dark, but creeps i' the light.

Lovelace, like Cartwright, is of opinion that obscenity is permissible if it be artfully veiled.[1] Astonishing as it is that the men of Cartwright's generation should have been blind to the fact that Fletcher was ten times more indecent than Shakespeare, it is even more wonderful to find the sober William Habington praising the former for the virtuous intentions of his plays.[2] Sir Roger L'Estrange, however, throws some light upon the subject, by showing the spirit in which the girls of the period sought to improve their morals by studying such models as Celia in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, or Florimel in *The Maid in the Mill*.[3]

The ideal of morality and art reflected in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher is, in fact, that of a court consciously comparing its own standard of refinement with the tastes of its ruder fathers. Birkenhead and Cartwright will no longer tolerate the "wit" of *Euphues*, which pleased the ladies and gentlemen of the court of Elizabeth, and was represented in such comedies as *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It:* it has gone out of fashion, they say, like trunk-hose. The wit that is now aimed at is the style described two generations later by Dryden, when, speaking of Shakespeare, he says that "Beaumont and Fletcher understood and imitated the conversation of

[1] Dyce's edition of *Beaumont and Fletcher*, vol. i. p. 25 :—

> View here a loose thought said with such a grace
> Minerva might have spoke in Venus' face,
> So well disguised, that 'twas conceived by none
> But Cupid had Diana's linen on.

[2] *Ibid* vol. i p 27 :—

> Revive then, mighty soul, and vindicate
> From th' age's rude affronts thy injured fame,
> Instruct the envious with how chaste a flame
> Thou warm'st the lover; how severely just
> Thou wert to punish, if he burned to lust,
> With what a blush thou didst the maid adorn,
> But tempted with how innocent a scorn.

[3] *Ibid.* vol. i. p. 31 :—

> The [illegible]

gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet before them could paint as they have done."[1] In the days of James I., according to Donne,

> To be like the Court was a play's praise;

and all the external, well-defined code of behaviour which a Court prescribes was taken as the standard of the dramatist, in preference to those profounder instincts of the national conscience which had expressed themselves in the plays of Shakespeare. So strong and tenacious was the grasp which the artificial laws of etiquette fixed upon the imagination of society, so brilliantly were they reflected by Beaumont and Fletcher, that many of the plays of these poets held the stage up to the latter half of the eighteenth century; and though it would be now impossible to revive them, they are still often judged by canons of taste first proclaimed in their own generation. It is the duty of history to examine their genius by a more permanent standard of criticism; otherwise we should be doing an injustice to the surpassing poetical excellence of Shakespeare. But before doing so, it will be well to record the scanty biographical information we possess of the "great twin brethren" who so successfully imitated the manners of their time.

John Fletcher, the elder of the two, was one of the nine children of Richard Fletcher, Fellow and President of Benet (Corpus Christi) College, Cambridge, and afterwards successively Bishop of Bristol, Worcester, and London. The poet (who was first cousin of Phineas and Giles Fletcher) was born in 1579 at Rye, in Sussex, of which place his father then held the living. He was admitted pensioner of Benet College, Cambridge, on the 15th October 1591, and was made Bible Clerk in 1593, but there is no record of his having taken a degree. Nor is it certain when he began his career as a dramatist: the first play of which he is known to be the author, *The Woman Hater*, was produced in 1606 or 1607. It is probable, however,

[1] *Essay of Dramatic Poesy:* Speech of Neander.

that, as his father, who died in 1596, left his family in straitened circumstances, he had attempted before this date to support himself by writing for the stage. His alliance with Beaumont perhaps began with *Philaster*, which was acted in 1608 or 1609, and from this date onwards he continued to produce plays with great rapidity till he fell a victim to the plague in August 1625. He was buried in St. Saviour's, Southwark, the exact situation of his grave being unknown.

Francis Beaumont, the third son of Francis Beaumont, was born in 1585 at Grace-Dieu, in Leicestershire, a property which, originally forming part of a monastery, had been purchased in 1539 by his grandfather, John Beaumont, surveyor of Leicestershire for the Crown. His father was serjeant-at-law, and was made one of the Justices of the Common Pleas in 1593. Francis was admitted as a gentleman commoner at Broadgates Hall (afterwards Pembroke College), Oxford, in 1597; but he remained only a short time at the University, and was entered as a member of the Inner Temple on the 3rd November 1600. He probably had not the same motives as Fletcher for exerting himself as a dramatist; but his love of poetry was early shown by his *Salmacis and Hermaphroditus*, (1602), a paraphrase of Ovid's story which, like his elegy on Lady Markham (1609), is marked by a taste for violent conceits, the natural product of the Euphuistic movement in literature. In 1607 he wrote a copy of commendatory verses in honour of Ben Jonson's *Volpone;* and the graceful lines with which Jonson repaid the compliment show a sincere appreciation of the genius of the younger poet. Beaumont married Ursula, daughter and coheiress of Henry Isley of Sundridge, in Kent, by whom he had two daughters, the younger of them, Frances, being born after his death, which happened on the 6th March 1616. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

There is no record of the way in which the partnership between Beaumont and Fletcher originated Aubrey, whose evidence, owing to his credulity and love of gossip, is seldom very satisfactory, says in his *Lives of Eminent*

Men: "There was a wonderful consimility of fancy between him (Beaumont) and Mr. J. Fletcher. . . . They lived together on the Bank Side, not far from the play-house, both batchelors, lay together, had one wench in the house between them, which they did so admire, the same cloathes and cloaks, etc., between them." Nor can we be sure of the method on which the joint authorship of their plays was combined. Pope says in an epigrammatic line, "Beaumont's judgment checked what Fletcher writ,"[1] and though he calls this tradition "the bald cant of women and boys," it is in accordance with contemporary criticism,[2] and agrees with Dryden's account, who says: "Beaumont was so accurate a judge of plays, that Ben Jonson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure, and 'tis thought used his judgment in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots."[3] It may also be observed that, in the plays of which Beaumont is certainly part author, such as *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Scornful Lady*, and others, both the structure of the plot and the distribution of the characters are much more artistic than in those which were produced by Fletcher alone after Beaumont's death. Finally, as I shall presently show, it is always easy to distinguish the style of Fletcher from that of Beaumont in those plays which they composed together. But when all minor differences are allowed for, it is plain that there must have been a marvellous harmony in the genius of the two poets. Both were brilliant and fluent talkers; both by their birth and position were intimately acquainted with the manners of aristocratic society: and in the dramas which Fletcher

[1] *Epistle to Augustus*, v. 84.

[2] Thus Cartwright says (Commendatory Poems on Beaumont and Fletcher, Dyce's edition, vol. i. p. 41):—

> Though when all Fletcher writ, and the entire
> Man was indulged unto that sacred fire,
> His thoughts, and his thoughts' dress, appeared both such
> That 'twas his happy fault to do too much;
> [illegible]
> . . . .
> Though thus he called his judge into his fame,
> And for that aid allowed him half the fame,
> 'Tis known that sometimes he did stand alone.

[3] *Essay of Dramatic Poesy:* Speech of Neander.

those which prevailed in the generation after the battle of Marathon, when Æschylus and Sophocles carried to its perfection the Attic drama.

In time the enthusiasm in the body of the English nation cooled, and the lyric inspiration of the dramatist sank in the same proportion. On the other hand, the theatre became more and more a little world by itself; its rules and conventions accumulated; tastes grew exacting and critical; and, as has been said, the sophisticated conceptions of the courtiers, who formed the most influential part of the audience, prevailed over the natural sense of the people. What the courtiers demanded above all things in a play was novelty of situation and character; the desire to gratify this passion in the audience is the most notable feature in the work of Beaumont and Fletcher. Fifty-eight of their plays survive, and in these it is scarcely too much to say that not one scene is like another. Fletcher in particular possessed a facility of invention only surpassed by that of Lope de Vega. Like Agathon, the dramatist of the Athenian decadence, he constructed his own plots. Both he and Beaumont brought together, in a completely abstract spirit, romantic ideas and situations which they knew would prove effective on the stage. *Philaster*, for example, is constructed partly from recollections of Sidney's *Arcadia*, partly from the situation in *Hamlet*. *The Sea Voyage* is evidently a combination of some of the ideas in *The Tempest* with others borrowed from Ariosto. In *The Knight of Malta*, Oriana, the heroine, is, like Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, apparently "done to death by slanderous tongues," and, like Juliet, buried alive in a tomb. In *The Tamer Tamed*, Fletcher imagines the fortunes of Shakespeare's Petruchio with a second wife in whom he meets more than his match. Here and there he inserts episodes in his plays borrowed from tales by Cervantes or other Spanish or Italian novelists; but I do not recollect one tragedy or comedy of his composition in which the framework of the play is not of his own contriving.

As he differed from Shakespeare in this abstract mode

of constructing his plots, so he had his own characteristic manner of conducting the action. Shakespeare's mode of developing the dramatic situation (δέσις, as Aristotle calls it) is marked by a noble simplicity. A very few scenes suffice to show us the nature of the complication that has to be unravelled, and these are so skilfully arranged that, even in those comedies which turn on confusion, the poet avoids the necessity of the clumsy expedient by which Plautus explains the initial situation in a prologue. In course of time this truly poetical simplicity appeared tame to the sophisticated taste of the spectators. They required to be stimulated by a rapid succession of incidents—whether probable or not was immaterial—and by a plot which held the imagination in suspense. Fletcher kept these requirements of his audience constantly in view. The movement of his dramas was never languid; a series of exciting situations accompanied by swift and brilliant dialogue kept alive interest, and provoked admiration with sudden turns of the kaleidoscope. As Cartwright said of them :—

> No vast uncivil bulk swells any scene,
> The strength's ingenious and the vigour clean,
> None can prevent the fancy and see through
> At the first opening ; all stand wondering how
> The thing will be until it is.

We have not far to look for the model of Fletcher's style. It came from Spain. The Spanish poet La Cueba claims for his country a pre-eminence in the particular qualities which Cartwright praises in the structure of Fletcher's plays. He says: "Invention, grace, and plot, are peculiar to the ingenious Spanish play, and that without impropriety, in spite of what its rivals say. The intricate complication and its *dénouement*, inimitable by any foreign play, supply scenes and acts."[1] Though it was only by

[1] Mas la invencion, la gracia, y traza es propia
A la ingeniosa fabula de España ;
No qual dicen sus emulos impropia :
Scenas y actos suple la maraña
Tan intricada y la soltura de ella
Inimitabile de ninguna estraña
Parnaso Español, vol. viii p. 62.

slow degrees that the Spanish type of romance supplanted on the stage the style originated by Marlowe and developed by Shakespeare, Spanish influence had long made itself felt in English works of imagination. We have already seen how Sidney's *Arcadia* was directly inspired by the *Diana Enamorada*, itself a late development of the Spanish romances of chivalry. From this source sprang that numerous class of self-sacrificing heroines typified in Greene's Dorothea and Shakespeare's Viola, of which the latest example is the female page Bellario in the *Philaster* of Beaumont and Fletcher.

I have traced the beginnings of this Spanish taste on the stage in the work of Munday and Heywood, but in Heywood's plays there is no attempt to absorb the interest of the audience in the intricacy of the plot. The first appearance of that dramatic artifice in an English play is, I believe, Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman*, and the next—though again I speak with hesitation—Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* and *King and no King*. In these three dramas the *dénouement* is a surprise to the spectators. But it was not till the death of Beaumont that Fletcher developed to their full extent the characteristics of the Spanish drama, and though I do not know that there is any direct evidence that he borrowed from Lope de Vega, I feel sure from his practice that he must have studied the methods of the great Spanish playwright.

The dramatic method of Fletcher is well illustrated in his *Beggar's Bush*. It is easy to see that the prime motive in the structure of this play was a desire to amuse the theatre with an imitation of the manners of thieves and beggars, and that Fletcher found his first hint in the cant of the criminal classes described in Dekker's *Bellman*. In order to throw these materials into a dramatic form, he has taken suggestions from a story of Cervantes, out of which he has invented a plot representing the fortunes of Florez, who, though the rightful heir, through his mother, to the Earldom of Flanders, has been driven while a child from that country with his father by the usurpation of Wolfort. Gerrard, his father, is living, under

the name of Clause, in disguise near Bruges with a society of beggars, of which he is elected king; and the play shows how, by the assistance of the beggars, Florez is reinstated in his Earldom. The *Beggar's Bush* satisfies all the requirements of the stage in the days of James I.: it has an ingenious, bustling plot, lively and well-marked characters, unflagging spirit, movement, energy; every quality in fact short of that which characterises the work of Shakespeare—poetical inspiration. Something of the ancient life survives even in the bare letter of the play. It was a favourite with Coleridge. "I could read it," he is reported to have said, "from morning to night: how sylvan and sunshiny it is!"[1] and if we are content to judge by the Spanish standard this praise is well-deserved.

As much may be allowed to *The Spanish Curate*. Fletcher took his first suggestion of this play from the Spanish novel *Gerardo*, in which the writer, Cespides, relates the devices by which one Leandro introduces himself into the house of a lawyer with whose wife he is in love. In the original story is to be found the sketch of Lopez, the curate, which Fletcher has converted to the purposes of his drama with true comic spirit. Lopez being a friend of Bartolus the lawyer, Leandro resolves to gain the desired introduction by means of the curate, whose distinguishing features are his laziness and love of money. He accordingly writes a letter, purporting to come from his father, in which Lopez, as an old friend, is asked to promote the interests of Leandro. Lopez, who knows nothing of the young man or his father, is at first naturally unable to remember his correspondent, but when Leandro mentions that he has a charge of five hundred ducats to deliver to his friend, the curate's memory is marvellously quickened, and he recalls with tender sentiment his former companionship:—

> Alonzo Tiveria!
> Lord, Lord, that time should play the treacherous knave thus!
> Why he was the only friend I had in Spain, sir
> I knew your mother too, a handsome gentlewoman:

[1] *Table Talk*, ii. 119.

> She was married very young; I married 'em;
> I do remember now the masques and sports then,
> The fireworks and the fine delights. Good faith, sir,
> Now I look in your face—whose eyes are those, Diego?
> Nay, if he be not just Alonzo's picture.[1]

This genuinely comic character with the intrigue of Leandro would have furnished a sufficient framework for a short drama, but it is evident that it would have been too simple for the audience, and Fletcher felt himself obliged in the Spanish manner to complicate the plot by interweaving in it a second action founded on another story in *Gerardo.*

He does the same thing in *The Little French Lawyer.* Here the prime motive is a "humour" conceived in the spirit of Ben Jonson. La Writ, an advocate, and a zealous member of his profession, is induced, much against his will, to act as second in a duel, after which, having chanced to disarm two adversaries, he develops a passion for fighting that seriously interferes with his practice at the bar. When Fletcher had conceived this character he seems to have considered how it could be introduced into a play, and to have solved the problem by adapting some of the incidents of an Italian story, the main current of which runs quite apart from the circumstances leading to La Writ's duel.[2] Another character of the same kind is the Humorous Lieutenant, in the play of that name, which is constructed from Horace's anecdote of Lucullus and his soldier, but this too has no necessary connection with the plot of the play, in which the complication is caused by representing a father and a son in love with the same woman.

Fletcher's abstract method of constructing plots will account both for the enormous contemporary popularity of his plays, and for the neglect into which they have now fallen. The critics of the seventeenth century judged solely by the canons of the stage. All of them were experienced spectators of acted plays, and Fletcher's

[1] *The Spanish Curate,* Act ii. Sc. 2.

[2] For the origin of the plot of this play see Dyce's edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, vol. iii p. 459.

practice answered to their idea of what action in the theatre should be:—

> None can prevent the fancy and see through
> At the first opening; all stand wondering how
> The thing will be until it is.

This was also the ideal of action in the later days of the Attic drama; and an English admirer of Fletcher in the seventeenth century might have cited Aristotle's approval of Agathon's method: "In some tragedies none [of the characters] are well known, as in Agathon's *Antheus*, where incidents and names alike are fictitious, and yet they give none the less pleasure."[1] Fletcher did what he tried to do: he pleased his audience; and his audience gave him his reward.

But the crucial test of a play's quality is only applied when it is read. So long as the illusion of the stage gives credit to the action, and the words and gestures of the actor impose themselves on the imagination of the spectator, the latter will pass over a thousand imperfections which reveal themselves to the reader, who, as he has to satisfy himself with the drama of silent images, will not be content if this in any way falls short of his conception of truth and nature. Shakespeare's work stands the reading ordeal; Fletcher's does not. His plays are a living example of the truth of Horace's principle:—

> Difficile est proprie communia dicere; tuque
> Rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
> Quam si proferres ignota indictaque primus.

For how can the reader feel fear, pity, joy, or grief in situations which are obviously artificial, and in which the dramatists themselves have not taken the trouble to observe the laws of external probability necessary to produce illusion?

Fletcher, for example, opens *The Beggar's Bush* with a dialogue between a merchant and a courtier, in which the former asks about the situation of affairs in the country, having, as he says, been absent from it for *five* years; in reply the courtier tells him of a war

[1] *Poetics*, chap. ix. 7 (Butcher's translation).

between Flanders and Brabant which lasted for *seven* years, and he proceeds to relate how, at the close of this, Florez, the hero, was carried off as a mere child, though in the play he appears as a full-grown man! In *Philaster* (which seems to be mainly the work of Beaumont) the whole situation turns on the disguise, as a page, of Euphrasia, which at the close of the play she accounts for thus:—

After you were gone
I grew acquainted with my heart, and searched
What stirred it so: alas, I found it love!

. . . . . .

For this I did delude my noble father
With a feigned pilgrimage, and dressed myself
In habit of a boy; and for I knew
My birth no match for you, I was past hope
Of having you; and understanding well
That when I made discovery of my sex
I could not stay with you, I made a vow,
By all the most religious things a maid
Could call together, never to be known,
Whilst there was hope to hide me from men's eyes,
For other than I seemed, that I might ever
Abide with you.[1]

Out of this disguise arise all kinds of misfortunes, among them an accusation of immorality, brought against the Princess Arethusa by Megra, a maid of honour, who attempts thereby to neutralise the consequences of the vicious conduct in which she has been herself detected. Hallam justly censures the improbability of a situation in which a princess is condemned on the evidence of such a woman.[2] But he does not notice the far worse fault in the conduct of Bellario or Euphrasia. For though she is intended to be an example of pure and self-sacrificing love, yet, knowing as she does that all the misfortunes of others are brought about by her own disguise and the foolish vow she has *voluntarily* made, she will not reveal her sex until she is forced by the threat of torture and death. She ought thus to deprive herself of all claim on our admiration or even sympathy.

[1] *Philaster*, Act v. Sc. 5.
[2] *History of European Literature* (1860), vol. iii. p. 324.

Many isolated situations of splendid dramatic power may be selected from the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. The finest of these, in Charles Lamb's opinion, is the scene between Thierry and Ordella in *Thierry and Theodoret.* The King of France has been warned by an oracle that he can only be cured of an incapacity, which deprives him and his kingdom of the hope of an heir, by the voluntary sacrifice of the first female worshipper who shall meet him coming from the temple of Diana. He encounters a veiled figure, and a highly dramatic dialogue ensues, in which the woman expresses her willingness to die. She lifts her veil, and the King recognises his newly-married wife, Ordella.[1] A more striking situation could not be imagined, but it is conceived in the abstract, and has no organic connection with the action of the play, which is itself nothing but a series of episodes. Another very powerful situation is inserted in *The Custom of the Country.* A woman gives protection to a young man who, having killed an antagonist in a street brawl, is fleeing from the officers of justice. He who has been killed (or rather is supposed to be killed) turns out to be the woman's own son. She conceals the murderer, and, when the officers have departed, bids him come forth with his face veiled, that she may henceforth be unable to recognise the man she has saved.[2] Unfortunately this dramatic scene is embedded in the midst of others, alien both to it and to the main action, some of which are among the most disgusting that Fletcher ever imagined.

Examples like these are sufficient to show that the first aim of this dramatist was not the ideal truth of nature, but the novel, the marvellous, the exceptional—whatever, in short, is useful for theatrical effect What he likes best is an imaginary situation, so remote from experience that his fancy can construct events as it pleases in an abstract void. In *A Wife for a Month* he supposes the case of a man married by a tyrant king to a wife whom he loves, and with whom he may live for a month, without

[1] *Thierry and Theodoret*, Act iv. Sc. 1.
[2] *The Custom of the Country*, Act ii. Sc. 4.

exercising the rights of a husband, being at the end of that period condemned to die.[1] *The Double Marriage* represents the saintly conduct of Juliana, whose husband, while on an expedition, marries another woman and brings her back to Juliana's house.[2]

2. Such being the principle on which Beaumont and Fletcher constructed their plots, we might infer beforehand what must necessarily be their method of creating character. Shakespeare, taking a well-known romantic story, makes it instinct with dramatic life. He imagines natural characters in an ideal sphere. Everyone feels that Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Portia, and Rosalind, are living men and women. Ben Jonson, on the contrary, turns his face away from romance, and generalises his characters from actual observation of men and manners. Though his *dramatis personæ* have none of the universal nature of Shakespeare's, we feel that his portraits of bullies, cheats, hypocrites and fanatics, his Bobadil, Tucca, Ananias, Face, Zeal-of-the-Land-Busy, have an air of particular historical truth. Beaumont and Fletcher take hints both from Shakespeare and Jonson, and yet produce something different from either. They employ Jonson's analytical methods, but remove them into the sphere of romance. Hence their characters are invariably abstract types. In the invention of these types they show boundless ingenuity. We have the type of the voluptuous tyrant in Valentinian, in the King of *The Maid's Tragedy*, in the Frederic of *A Wife for a Month;* the type of the coward or impostor in high place, such as Bessus in *A King and No King*, Protaldy in *Thierry and Theodoret*, Boroski in *A Loyal Subject;* the type of the plain blunt soldier, opposed to the cringing courtier, like Melantius in *The Maid's Tragedy*, and Mardonius in *A King and No King;* innumerable varieties of the courtier type, but particularly the gay debauchee—Monsieur Thomas, in the play of that name, Rutilio in *The Custom of the Country*, Mirabel in *The Wild-Goose Chase*, Valentine in *Wit*

[1] *A Wife for a Month*, Act i. Sc. 1.
[2] *The Double Marriage*, Act iii. Sc. 3.

Without Money, Don John in *The Chances;* almost as many species of virtuous or vicious women, varying from the wickedness of Brunhalt in *Thierry and Theodoret* and the depravity of Bacha in *A King and No King*, either to the matronly modesty of Lucina in *Valentinian* and Oriana in the *Knight of Malta*, or to the licentious chastity of Celia in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, and of Florimel in *The Maid of the Mill.* And yet among all these it may be doubted whether the name of one conveys a distinct idea of man or woman to the English imagination.

The most interesting class of characters in Beaumont and Fletcher is that which gives evidence of having been founded on self-knowledge, and which has therefore some colour of genuine emotion. They can depict with great power the inward struggle between conscience and sensual passion; and in such situations they animate the words of the speaker with a lyrical feeling which must have come from the heart. Such, for example, is the character of Arbaces—probably the creation of Beaumont—at once valiant and vain-glorious, headlong, and self-reproachful, whose almost boundless self-esteem is suddenly dashed to the ground by the discovery that he is—as he wrongly supposes—in love with his sister. Such again is Mountferrat in the *Knight of Malta*, who, false to his religious oath, sensual, cruel, yet not incapable of higher feelings, is a remarkable figure, which I doubt not suggested to Scott the idea of Brian de Bois Guilbert in *Ivanhoe.*

But in general Beaumont and Fletcher seem to create their characters somewhat mechanically, and their creations suffer from two grave defects inherent in the style of Spanish romance. They are improbable, and they are inconsistent. The sentiments and actions of their *dramatis personæ* are worked up, for the dramatic expression of the type, to such a height that they appear simply theatrical. Valentinian and Frederic are monsters of lust and tyranny; on the opposite side Archas and Aecius are monsters of loyalty; and Oriana, Juliana, and Honora of patience or chastity. We do not believe in the reality of such beings. The second and worse fault is Moral Incon-

sistency. The conversions and metamorphoses which the characters of these poets undergo are prodigious. In *The Elder Brother*, Charles, the hero of the play, is represented as a scholar so rapt in study that he has never heard of venison, does not know what anchovies and caviare are, because they are not mentioned by the ancients, thinks of woman as of

> A curious piece of learning,
> Handsomely bound, and of a dainty letter,

and is generally so much of a philosopher, that his father hopes he will have no difficulty in making him sign away his inheritance in favour of his younger brother.[1] Yet immediately Charles sees Angela, he falls in love with her, addresses her in madrigals like a courtier, discovers himself to be a shrewd man of business, and, though he has never before touched a sword, shows himself to be a match for three or four antagonists at once.

In *Philaster* the character of the usurping king is modelled on that of Hamlet's uncle, and Beaumont (who seems to have been the principal author of the play) has in one scene imitated the famous soliloquy of the latter, "O my offence is rank, etc." The king in *Hamlet* prays :—

> Forgive me my foul murder !
> That cannot be ; since I am still possessed
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,
> My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
> May one be pardoned and retain the offence ?[2]

The king in *Philaster* likewise prays in an "aside" :—

> Yet, if it be your wills, forgive the sin
> I have committed ; let it not fall
> Upon this understanding child of mine !
> She has not broke your laws. But how can I
> Look to be heard of gods that must be just,
> Praying upon the ground I hold by wrong ?[3]

Beaumont seems not to have reflected that the wonderful effect produced by the soliloquy of Hamlet's

[1] *Elder Brother*, Act ii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Hamlet*, Act iii. Sc. 3.
[3] *Philaster*, Act ii. Sc. 4.

uncle is due to its being a confession to heaven of a secret crime, forced from a guilty conscience; whereas the usurpation of Philaster's uncle has been accomplished by open violence, and the motive which operates with him from first to last is fear of the people. Such an "aside" as he puts into the king's mouth is perfectly frigid.

The character of Evadne, in *The Maid's Tragedy*, is drawn at the outset with bold and firm strokes. Though she is represented as a woman not less resolute in her vicious conduct than Webster's Vittoria Corombona, it is perhaps natural that so abandoned a creature should have yielded to physical fear, when threatened with death by her brother, Melantius; nor is it inconceivable that she should have resolved to murder the king in revenge for her own dishonour; but that, after committing this crime, she should, in a melting mood, have solicited the love of Amintor, whom she had previously treated with the worst contumely a woman can inflict upon a husband, is a moral impossibility.

The most inconsistent of all Fletcher's characters, perhaps, is that of Maximus in *Valentinian*. The first four acts of this play are devoted to representing the injury done by the imperial tyrant to the spotless Lucina. Maximus, Lucina's husband, is at first represented as occupied with the single-hearted purpose of avenging her voluntary death. So long as he seeks to effect this, partial sympathy may be granted to him, even though he works towards his end by deceit, involving the death of his noble friend Aecius; but after Valentinian's assassination we are shocked by the following soliloquy:—

> Gods! what a sluice of blood have I let open!
> My happy ends are come to birth; he's dead
> And I revenged; the empire's all a fire,
> And desolation everywhere inhabits·
> And shall I live, that am the author of it,
> To know Rome from the awe of the world the pity?
> My friends are gone before too of my sending;
> And shall I stay? is aught else to be lived for?
> Is there another friend, another wife,
> Or any third holds half their worthiness,

To linger here alive for? is not virtue
In their two everlasting souls departed,
And in their bodies' first flame fled to heaven?
Can any man discover this, and love me?
For though my justice were as white as truth,
My way was crooked to it; that condemns me:
And now, Aëcius and my honoured lady,
That were preparers to my rest and quiet,
The lines to lead me to Elysium,
You that but stept before me on assurance
I would not leave your friendship unrewarded,
First smile upon the sacrifice I have sent ye,
Then see me coming boldly!—Stay! I am foolish,
Somewhat too sudden to my own destruction,
This great end of my vengeance may grow greater.
Why may not I be Cæsar, yet no dying?
Why should I not catch at it? fools and children
Have had that strength before me, and obtained it;
And, as the danger stands, my reason bids me.
I will, I dare. My dear friends, pardon me:
I am not fit to die yet, if not Cæsar.
I am sure the soldier loves me, and the people,
And I will forward.[1]

3. As regards the element of "thought," which, according to Aristotle's definition, may be taken to cover the representation of motive in action and of emotion in expression, nothing can be more instructive than a comparison between the respective dramatic manners of Shakespeare and Fletcher. Both poets make their characters speak as the representatives of an order of things still, to some extent, feudal in constitution and chivalrous in tradition; but the sentiments of Shakespeare's personages, while reflecting the spirit of their age, excite universal interest: Fletcher's moral ideas are the typical utterances of a particular society in an advanced stage of decay. The main principles, animating the dramatic situation, are in both cases Loyalty, Honour, Love; problems are raised by both involving the mutual duties of subject and sovereign, of the knight and his order, of the lover and his mistress; but the contrast in the treatment of these questions is extreme.

While it is plain that Shakespeare's political principles

[1] *Valentinian*, Act v. Sc. 3.

were strongly monarchical, the idea of monarchy is in him coextensive with patriotism: he looks on the sovereign as the representative of the State. The Bastard in the concluding words of *King John* speaks the sentiments of the poet and his audience:—

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three quarters of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them Nought shall make us rue,
> If England to itself do rest but true.[1]

Where there is a conflict between a king and his subjects, Shakespeare gives expression to the growing idea of the divine right of kings, but he does so with an air of dispassionate philosophy, and by the mouth of characters whose vice or weakness, not less than their misfortunes, modifies the force of the sentiment. Thus it is Richard II. who says:—

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm off from an anointed king;
> The breath of worldly men cannot depose
> The deputy elected by the Lord.[2]

It is the vile king in Hamlet who relies on the sanctity of his office:—

> There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
> That treason can but peep to what it would,
> Acts little of his will.[3]

Shakespeare's profound and searching thought shows kings themselves their fundamental equality with those they govern. Henry V. says to his soldiers, as he talks with them unknown on the eve of Agincourt:—

> I think the king is but a man, as I am; the violet smells to him as it doth to me: all his senses have but human conditions · his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and, though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.[4]

[1] *King John*, Act v. Sc. 7.
[2] *King Richard II.* Act iii. Sc. 2.
[3] *Hamlet*, Act iv. Sc. 5.
[4] *King Henry V.* Act iv. Sc. 1.

But in Fletcher the office, the ceremony, the power, of the Sovereign appear so tremendous to the poet and to his particular audience that it is the virtuous characters who insist most strongly on the duty of passive obedience and non-resistance. When Maximus is protesting against the misgovernment of Valentinian, the loyal Aëcius stops him thus :—

> Remember,
> We are but subjects, Maximus : obedience
> To what is done, and grief for what is ill done,
> Is all we can call ours. The hearts of princes
> Are like the temples of the gods : pure incense,
> Until unhallowed hands defile those offerings,
> Burns ever there.[1]

In *The Maid's Tragedy* Evadne boldly avows her unchastity to her husband before telling him the name of her seducer. She continues :—

> EVAD. You dare not strike him.
> AMINTOR. Do not wrong me so.
> Yes, if his body were a poisonous plant,
> That it were death to touch, I have a soul
> Will throw me on him.
> EVAD. Why 'tis the King.
> AMINT. The King!
> EVAD. What will you do now?
> AMINT. It is not the King.
> EVAD. What did he make this match for, dull Amintor?
> AMINT. Oh! thou hast named a word that wipes away
> All thoughts revengeful! In that sacred word
> "The King" there lies a terror: what frail man
> Dares lift his hand against it? Let the gods
> Speak to him what they please: till when let us
> Suffer and wait.[2]

Archas, the hero of *The Loyal Subject*, not only humbly thanks his sovereign for deposing him from his office, but suffers him to send for his daughters to Court for a purpose about which there can be no mistake, and, after enduring still further indignities, addresses the soldiers, who are rising in his behalf, thus :—

[1] *Valentinian*, Act i. Sc. 3.
[2] *Maid's Tragedy*, Act ii. Sc. 1.

> I charge ye, as ye are men, my men, my lovers,
> As ye are honest faithful men, fair soldiers,
> Let down your anger! Is not this our Sovereign
> The head of mercy and of law? Who dares then,
> . . . .
> But with obedient knees and pious duties?
> Are we not all his subjects, all sworn to him?
> Has not he power to punish our offences,
> And do not we daily fall into 'em? Assure yourselves
> I did offend, and highly, grievously;
> This good sweet prince I offended, my life forfeited,
> Which yet his mercy and his old love met with,
> And only let me feel his light rod this way:
> Ye are to thank him for your general;
> Pray for his life and fortune, sweat your bloods for him.[1]

So too with the principle of honour. The idea of honour, the special virtue of knighthood, arising naturally out of a society primarily devoted to the exercise of arms, consisted partly in the knight's internal sense of his duty, and partly in his external sense of what was expected from him by his peers. Even in the last days of English chivalry—that is to say, in the latter part of the reign of Queen Elizabeth—the knightly idea was a living force. We see it vividly expressed in Sidney's *Arcadia*, in Spenser's portrait of the Noble Courtier in *Mother Hubberd's Tale*, and in the sublime stanza on honour I have elsewhere cited from *The Faery Queen*.[2] The glow of the setting sun of chivalry suffuses almost all Shakespeare's plays, but that supreme dramatist, as I have already said, shows us how the principle of honour appeals to different orders of men. Hotspur feels its impulse extravagantly in his imagination as the spur to valiant action, raising him in his own esteem and in that of his fellows. To him—

> It were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks.

[1] *Loyal Subject*, Act iv. Sc. 7. [2] See vol ii. p. 275.

The same motive, half internal, half external, strengthened by reason and reflection, inspires Henry V. at Agincourt:—

> By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost;
> It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
> But if it be a sin to covet honour,
> I am the most offending soul alive.

To Falstaff, on the other hand, honour means merely reputation, the Italian "Onore"; and the comedy of his character consists largely in his vast efforts to conceal his incapacity to act up to the external standard of knighthood. He does not believe in honour on its ideal side: "What is honour? a word. What is in that word honour? what is that honour? air. A trim reckoning!" Falstaff's belief was in secret extensively held in the Court of James I. True chivalry was extinct in that society. But in proportion as the spiritual meaning of chivalry was weakened, the external code of honour became more rigid and exacting. As all the members of the Court were required to live up to its standard, duelling under James I. became so prevalent that it had to be restrained by law. Cleremont, in Fletcher's *Little French Lawyer*, mentions, with characteristic coarseness of language, the causes of duels fought in consequence of breaches of the recognised code of honour:—

> I'll not quarrel with this gentleman
> For wearing stammel breeches; or this gamester
> For playing a thousand pounds that owes me nothing;
> * * * *
> Nor five hundred
> Of such like toys that at no part concern me.
> Marry, where my honour or my friend's is questioned,
> I have a sword, and I think I may use it
> To the cutting of a rascal's throat or so,
> Like a good Christian.[1]

In such a state of society it was necessary for those who had no inclination to fighting to study what Touchstone calls "the books for good manners." Almost every cause of quarrel, that close observer informs us, might be

[1] *Little French Lawyer*, Act i. Sc. 1.

avoided except the lie direct, "and you may avoid this," he adds, "with an if."[1] How far in the succeeding reign manners degenerated, even beyond this point, may be inferred from the frequent appearance in Beaumont and Fletcher's plays of the coward, represented in such various shapes as Bessus, Protaldy, and Calianax, and also from the fact that the usual form of insult adopted to provoke a dull sense of honour to the fighting point is kicking.

This degradation of chivalry, accompanied by the extreme accentuation of the external code of the preceding reign, suggested to the dramatist many casuistical situations touching the question of honour. The most brilliant and effective example of it is to be found in *The Maid's Tragedy*. Here the relations between Evadne and the King provoke in the first place a dramatic colloquy between husband and wife, which throws the strongest light upon the meaning of the word honour as understood at Court:—

AMINTOR. These strange and sudden injuries have fallen
So thick upon me, that I lose all sense
Of what they are. Methinks I am not wronged;
Nor is it aught if from the censuring world
I can but hide it. Reputation,
Thou art a word, no more,—but thou hast shown
An impudence so high, that to the world
I fear thou wilt betray or shame thyself.
EVADNE. To cover shame I took thee: never fear
That I should blaze myself——
AMINT. Nor let the King
Know I conceive he wrongs me: then mine honour
Will thrust me into action: that[2] my flesh
Could bear with patience.[3]

And yet, when this last blow is given to his internal sense of honour, the wretched Amintor shrinks from acting. He is restrained by his sense of loyalty to his king from punishing the injury he has received as a man. Evadne, in spite of her promise, preserves her position by appealing to her husband to quiet the king's

[1] *As You Like It*, Act v. Sc. 4.
[2] *I.e.* the concealment of his shame.
[3] *Maid's Tragedy*, Act ii. Sc. 1.

jealousy; and Amintor, though for a moment stung out of his tameness to threaten his sovereign, submits:—

> There is
> Divinity about you, that strikes dead
> My rising passions: as you are my king
> I fall before you, and present my sword
> To cut mine own flesh if it be your will.[1]

Finally, the situation produces an entanglement between friends. Melantius, brother of Evadne, forces from Amintor a confession of the truth by an appeal to friendship, and a fresh question arises how the former is to avenge the honour of his family, without injury to the honour of his friend. But it is evident from the dialogue that the minds of both speakers are mainly preoccupied with what the world will think:—

> AMINTOR. Have a care
> Of me in what thou dost.
> MELANTIUS. Why thinks my friend
> I will forget his honour? or, to save
> The bravery of our house, will lose his fame,
> And fear to touch the throne of majesty?[2]

Even more indicative of the deep corruption of the times is the treatment by Beaumont and Fletcher of the passion of love, so closely allied, in the ages of chivalry, with the principles of honour and religion. In the dramas of Shakespeare love is rarely treated according to the Provençal tradition. It appears in them like other human passions, jealousy, ambition, vanity, revenge—though with more absorbing power than any—as the cause of adventures and misfortunes, but not as the subject of conscious analysis. Here and there the coarse manners of the age have left their traces on Shakespeare's dialogue; but the frequency with which characters like Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind, and Juliet have been presented on the stage by actresses of refined feeling, proves the essential purity of his conceptions. Fletcher, as the favourite dramatist of the Court, reflected the tradition of the troubadours, according to the perverse conception of it in a society which retained the forms of chivalry long after its

[1] *Maid's Tragedy*, Act iii. Sc. 1. [2] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 2.

spirit had become extinct. Almost all his dramas turn on some point of love, and the ingenuity with which he has invented situations to illustrate every variety of amorous problem cannot but excite admiration. But what a course of degeneracy do his dramas suggest! The ladies of the court of James I., like those of the mediæval Courts of Love, still called men their servants; but whereas, in the great days of chivalry, the service of the lover was subject to the strictest probationary rules, it was now, as we see in the comedy of *The Scornful Lady*, the sport of feminine caprice. Secrecy in love was a first principle of the troubadours. Their code proclaimed: *Qui non celat, amare non potest*, and the various stages of the passion were scientifically and discreetly veiled in such abstract terms as Danger, Wicked Tongue, Mercy, Pity, and the like. In Beaumont and Fletcher every aspect of love—even the most material—is debated, discussed, analysed by actors, for the amusement of a theatrical audience; when for example, Lillia-Bianca, a female character who is meant to leave the impression of agreeable gaiety, talks to her sister in a dialect which would not now be tolerated among *men* in any kind of decent society, Rosalura is shocked, but the dramatist evidently sees no harm:—

ROSALURA. Fie upon thee!
What talk hast thou?
LILLIA-BIANCA. Are not we alone, and merry?
Why should we be ashamed to speak what we think?[1]

This speech gives us an exact measure of the standard of morals accepted in the Jacobean court. Fletcher was by extraction and breeding a gentleman; he had no leaning to the vulgar sensuality which disgraces the style of Middleton, and as we shall presently see he was capable of forming a lofty abstract ideal of virtue. But as a dramatist he had a fine instinct how far his license might go, and it is evident that the public opinion among his courtly audience held that, so long as

[1] *Wildgoose Chase*, Act III. Sc. 1.

chastity was preserved in act, anything that was thought might be said without injury to the speaker. One of Fletcher's favourite characters is the woman who walks boldly and frankly in the midst of vice without being corrupted by it. Such are his Honora in *The Loyal Subject*, Lucinda in *The Knight of Malta*, and Celia in *The Humorous Lieutenant*, the last of whom is thus described by a gentleman at court:—

1ST GENTLEMAN. I offered all I had, all I could think of;
I tried her through all the points of the compass,
I think.
2ND GENTLEMAN. She studies to undo the court, to plant here
The enemy to our age, chastity.
She is the first that e'er balked a close arbour,
And the sweet contents within: she hates curled
heads too,
And setting up of beards she swears is idolatry.
1ST G. I never knew so fair a face so froze,
Yet she would make one think——
2ND G True by her carriage;
For she's as wanton as a kid to the outside,
As full of mocks and taunts.[1]

By a dialogue of this kind we can determine what allowance is to be made to Beaumont and Fletcher for the astounding grossness of their language. It was the age of the Countess of Essex and Mrs. Turner; and Beaumont and Fletcher only imitated faithfully the average tone of society. That there was no exaggeration in the kind of talk with which Amintor and Evadne in *The Maid's Tragedy* are greeted on the morrow of their marriage, is evident from what took place at the wedding of Sir Philip Herbert (afterwards Earl of Pembroke) and Lady Susan Vere:—

The king (says Sir Dudley Carlton, in a letter to Winwood) gave her, and she in her tresses and trinkets, brided and bridled it so handsomely, and indeed became herself so well, that the king said if she were unmarried, he would not give her, but keep her himself. . . . They were lodged in the council chamber where the king, in his shirt and night-gown gave them a *reveille-*

[1] *Humorous Lieutenant*, Act iv. Sc. 1.

matin before they were up, and spent a good time in or upon the bed, choose which you will believe.

From the low and sensual standard of morals in court society Fletcher's imagination naturally rebounded into a sphere of abstract virtue. In *The Knight of Malta* his conceptions of chastity are illustrated not less clearly than are his ideas of honour in *The Maid's Tragedy.* Miranda, the hero of the former play, appears as the type of all that is excellent in manly virtue. Perpetually assailed by the temptations of the flesh, and constantly on the point of yielding to them, he conquers himself by answering to the enthusiastic appeals which women make to his conscience. He is deeply in love with Oriana, the injured wife of Gomera, and she with him, and the following dialogue is taken from a scene in which he entreats her to answer his affection. She steadfastly resists, and, transcendental as her sentiments are, it is easy to understand that both the dramatist and his audience sincerely regarded them as a lesson in morality:—

MIRANDA. Fairest, let go my hand my pulse beats high,
And my moved blood rides high in every vein,
Lord of thyself now, soldier, and ever!
I would not, for Aleppo, this frail bark,
This bark of flesh, no better steersman had [lady?
Than has Mountferrat's [*Aside*] May you kiss me,
ORIANA. No; though 't be no essential injury,
It is a circumstance due to my lord,
To none else; and, my dearest friend, if hands,
Playing together, kindle heat in you,
What may the game at lips provoke unto?
MIRANDA. Oh, what a tongue is here! while she doth teach
My heart to hate my fond unlawful love,
She talks me more in love, with love to her;
My fires she quenches with her arguments,
But as she breathes 'em they blow fresher fires. [*Aside*]
Sit further! now my flame cools Husband! Wife!
There is some holy mystery in these names,
That sure the unmarried cannot understand.
ORI. Now thou art straight, and dost enamour me
So far beyond a carnal earthly love,
My very soul dotes on thee, and my spirits
Do embrace thine; my mind doth thy mind kiss

. . . . .

Nor is our spiritual love a barren joy,
For mark what blessed issue we'll beget
(Dearer than children to posterity),
A great example to men's conscience
And women's chastity; that is a child
More fair and comfortable than any heir.[1]

The frigidity of this last conceit betrays the want of genuine passion in the speech of Oriana; yet it is more tolerable than Fletcher's representation of exalted virtue in the conduct of young girls. Revolting as are the scenes of the brothel in *Pericles*, from which Fletcher appears to have taken the suggestion for numerous situations of the same class, there is a transparent purity in the soul of Shakespeare's Marina.

But I know nothing more offensive than the emphatic chastity of Fletcher's "maiden" heroines. Always ready to reply with congenial repartees to the solicitations of licentious courtiers, able to penetrate the intentions of obscene bawds and panders, they require us to believe that, with the words and acts of courtesans, they retain the purity of angels. There is elevation in the dialogue between Miranda and Oriana, but what are we to say of that between the virtuous Honora, daughter of Archas the Loyal Subject, and the apparently licentious Duke?

DUKE. Prithee, look on me
HONORA. Yes; I love to see you,
And could look on an age thus and admire you;
While you are good and temperate I dare touch you
Kiss your white hand—
DUKE. Why not my lips?
HON. I dare, sir.
DUKE. I do not think you dare.
HON. I am no coward [*kisses him*].
Do you believe me now? or now? or now, sir?
You make me blush; but, sure, I mean no ill, sir:
It had been fitter you had kissed me.
DUKE. That I'll do too [*kisses her*].
What hast thou wrought into me?
HON. I hope all goodness.
Whilst you are thus thus honest, I dare do anything,

[1] *Knight of Malta*, Act v. Sc. 1.

Thus hang upon your neck, and thus dote on you,
Bless those fair lights! Hell take me, if I durst not![1]

4. With regard to the difference in style between the plays of Shakespeare and those of Beaumont and Fletcher, two things are to be especially noted: first, that in respect of diction the change in the language of the younger poets, compared with that of their predecessor, takes the same direction as the style of Greek dramatic poetry in the period between Æschylus and Euripides, namely, the transition from the highly figurative, involved, and often contorted modes of expression, indicative of powerful thought and emotion, to the simpler, more lucid, but altogether tamer idioms of ordinary conversation; secondly, that, in respect of versification, an infallible test may be applied to distinguish the style of Beaumont from that of Fletcher. I will take the second point first. Beaumont's verse is much more like Shakespeare's than is Fletcher's: the use of the hendecasyllabic line is rare with the former; the lines are interlaced with each other, and the pauses varied, while rhymes are not infrequent: in Fletcher there are probably more lines of eleven syllables than of ten, and the pause is almost inevitably made, for the most part, at the end of the line, rhyme being discarded except at the close of a scene. That these characteristics differentiate the verse of Beaumont from that of Fletcher is demonstrable, since they are found quite separately, on the one hand, in *Four Plays in One*, which is known to be the unaided work of Beaumont, and, on the other, in all the plays of Fletcher which were produced after Beaumont's death, while the two contrasted styles may be found in different parts of all the plays which they are believed to have written in partnership. Taking *Philaster*, for example, I cannot doubt that the two following speeches by the hero of that play are the work of different hands:—

[1] *Loyal Subject*, Act iv. Sc. 3.

BEAUMONT

PHILASTER. Oh what should I do?
Why, who can but believe him? he does swear
So earnestly that if it were not true
The gods would not endure him. Rise, Bellario:
Thy protestations are so deep, and thou
Dost look so truly when thou utterest them,
That though I know them false as were my hopes,
I cannot urge thee further. But thou wert
To blame to injure me, for I must love
Thy honest looks, and take no revenge upon
Thy tender youth; a love from me to thee
Is from whate'er thou dost: it troubles me
That I have called the blood out of thy cheeks,
That did so well become thee. But, good boy,
Let me not see thee more: something is done
That will distract me, that will make me mad
If I behold thee. If thou tender'st me
Let me not see thee.[1]

FLETCHER

PHILASTER. Sir, let me speak next
And let my dying words be better with you
Than my dull living actions. If you aim
At the dear life of this sweet innocent,
You are a tyrant and a savage monster,
That feeds upon the blood you gave a life to;
Your memory shall be as foul behind you
As you are living; all your better deeds
Shall be in water writ, but this in marble;
No chronicle shall speak you though your own,
But for the shame of men. No monument
Though high and big as Pelion shall be able
To cover the base murder; make it rich
With brass, with purest gold, and shining jasper
Like the Pyramides; lay on epitaphs
Such as make great men gods, my little marble,
That only clothes my ashes, not my faults,
Shall far outshine it.[2]

In *The Maid's Tragedy* a dialogue between Melantius and Amintor may be similarly compared with one between Melantius and Evadne.

[1] *Philaster*, Act iii. Sc. 2. [2] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 3.

Beaumont

MELANTIUS. I have observed your words
Fall from your tongue wildly: and all your carriage
Like one that strove to show his merry mood,
When he was ill-disposed: you were not wont
To put such scorn into your speech, or wear
Upon your face ridiculous jollity;
Some sadness sits here, which your cunning would
Cover o'er with smiles, and 'twill not be. What is it?
AMINTOR. A sadness here! What cause
Can faith provide me for to make me so?
Am I not loved through all the isle? The King
Rains greatness on me? Have I not received
A lady to my bed, that in her eye
Keeps mounting fire, and on her tender cheeks
Inevitable colour, in her heart
A prison of all virtue?[1]

Fletcher

MELANTIUS. Force my swoln heart no further: I would save thee.
Your great maintainers are not here, they dare not:
Would they were all, and armed! I would speak loud;
Here's one should thunder to 'em. Will you tell me?
Thou hast no hope to 'scape: he that dares most
And damns away his soul to do thee service,
Will sooner snatch meat from a hungry lion,
Than come to rescue thee; thou hast death about thee;
He has undone thine honour, poisoned thy virtue,
And of a lovely rose left thee a canker.
EVADNE. Let me consider.
MEL. Do, whose child thou wert
Whose honour thou hast murdered, whose grave opened,
And so pulled on the gods that in their justice
They must restore him flesh again and life
And raise his dry bones to revenge this scandal.
EVAD. The gods are not of my mind: they had better
Let 'em lie sweet still in the earth, they'll stink here[2]

Once more, the following dialogue between Mardonius and Arbaces, in *A King and no King*, written by Beau-

[1] *Maid's Tragedy*, Act iii. Sc. 2. [2] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 1.

mont, stands in marked contrast with a scene in which the same characters are made to speak by Fletcher :—

BEAUMONT

MARDONIUS. You told Tigranes you had won his land
With that sole arm, propt by divinity,
Was not that bragging and a wrong to me,
That daily ventured lives?

ARBACES. Oh that thy name
Were great as mine! would I had paid my wealth
It were as great, as I might combat thee!
I would through all the regions habitable
Search thee, and having found thee, with my sword
Drive thee about the world, till I had met
Some place that yet man's curiosity
Hath missed of; there, there would I strike thee dead,
Forgotten of mankind; such funeral rites
As beasts could give thee, thou should'st have.[1]

FLETCHER

MARDONIUS. Who then shall tell thee of these childish follies
When I am dead? or who shall put to his?
To draw those virtues out of a flood of humours,
Where they are drowned, and make 'em shine again?
No, cut my head off:
Then you may talk, and be believed, and grow worse
And have your too self-glorious temper rocked
Into a dead sleep, and the kingdom with you
Till foreign swords be in your throats, and slaughter
Be everywhere about you like your flatterers.
Do, kill me.

ARBACES. Prithee be tamer, good Mardonius.
Thou know'st I love thee, nay I honour thee;
Believe it, good old soldier, I am all thine,
But I am racked clean from myself bear with me
Wo't thou bear with me, good Mardonius?[2]

Let us turn now to the second question, namely, what were the causes and characteristics of the great transition from the style of Shakespeare to that of Beaumont and

[1] *A King and No King*, Act i. Sc. 1.
[2] *Ibid.* Act iv. Sc. 2.

Fletcher. The essence of the distinction lies in this, that the dramatic style of Shakespeare, being largely lyrical, is part of himself, and varies with the state of his emotions or with the changes in his views of life, so that, as I have already shown, his dramas, when classified, exhibit at least three different standards of metrical diction. The style of Beaumont and Fletcher, on the contrary, is purely dramatic, and is determined by what they consider the requirements of the stage. Style is, in them, something so external that, at least in Fletcher's case, the manner can be easily detected, whether it be applied to tragedy or comedy. Beaumont's verse shows many traces of Shakespeare, whom he often imitates, though he has formed his manner under the conscious influence of his master Jonson. His rhythmical movements are refined and stately; the language more simple and lucid, but much less figurative and poetical than Shakespeare's. Fletcher's style, on the other hand, is completely original; but I imagine that, like Euripides and Menander, he unconsciously developed it to meet the prosaic tendencies in the taste of his audience, which desired above all things in a play novelty, intrigue and excitement. Passages of picturesque description and reflection, such as abound in Shakespeare, are rare both in him and Beaumont, but where they do occur, as in the beautiful picture of Bellario by the fountain in *Philaster*, and the tapestry scene in *The Maid's Tragedy*, I feel sure that Beaumont—who was under the spell of Shakespeare—was the painter. Fletcher would certainly have been incapable of producing the splendid description of the death of Arcite in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—a passage which, for vividness of painting, is worthy of a place beside the Pædagogus' report of the chariot race in the *Electra* of Sophocles.

Again, we seldom find, either in Beaumont or Fletcher, those rare combinations of metrical harmony for its own sake in which Shakespeare delighted. This, again, I imagine, was a concession to the taste of the audience, for, as the exquisite melody in the verse of *The Faithful Shepherdess* shows, Fletcher had a very fine and musical

ear. But the eágerness of the spectators for bustling action and witty repartee made them impatient of those passages of "linked sweetness long drawn out" which, in *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, had charmed the Elizabethan theatre. Fletcher's hearers were probably delighted with the effect of swift movement produced by his frequent use of the eleven-syllable line. For his tendency is to do away with the cæsura, and so to hasten to the close of the line, as the natural halting-place; and accordingly the variation of pause, after different syllables in the middle of the verse, practised by Shakespeare and Beaumont, almost disappears in Fletcher. The effect may be observed in any of those passages I have previously cited. I cannot think this metrical innovation was an improvement. One verse in Fletcher follows another with the restless succession of waves of the sea, and the general movement is buoyant and animated. But we miss the sense of measured repose that the ear demands; moreover the rhythm almost inevitably produces two most unpleasing mannerisms. In order to make up the proper number of syllables the poet often places at the end of a line, where by the scansion emphasis is impossible, a word which by the sense requires to be emphasised; and, on the other hand, the necessities of the scansion often cause him to throw the emphasis on the wrong word. The following instances of these faults are all taken from the opening scene in *Valentinian*, which consists of only about one hundred lines. In illustration of the first fault we find :—

> And sure I have tried a hundred, If I sáy *two*
> I speak within my compass.

> I find, by this *wench*,
> The calling of a bawd to be a strange
> A wise and subtle calling.

> I take it 'tis no bóy's *play*.

As examples of the second fault we have—

Tell me, and tell me truth,
Did you e'er know in all your course of practice,
In all the ways of woman you have rún through
(For I presume you have been broǘght up, Chilax,
As we to fetch and carry)—

Why what remains but néw nets for the purchase?[1]

I will conclude this chapter with an illustration of the contrast between the styles of Shakespeare and Fletcher, preserved for us by good fortune in the most dramatic form. In 1634 was published a play called *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which is said on the title page to be written "by the memorable worthies of their time, Mr. Jo. Fletcher and Mr. William Shakespeare." Did this external evidence stand alone, as proof of the authorship, we might set it down as a bookseller's trick; and indeed many scholars, including Hazlitt, Steevens and Knight, have refused to see in the play the hand of Shakespeare. For my own part, judging by the style of the first and fifth acts, I cannot conceive that any one but the author of *Troilus and Cressida* can have written these portions of the play; and I hold with Lamb, Coleridge and Dyce, that the assertion on the title-page is to be trusted. I do not, however, believe that Shakespeare and Fletcher worked at the play together. Dyce's reasoning on the whole question seems to me very judicious. He shows that several plays on the story of Palamon and Arcite had been written since 1566, when Richard Edwards first chose it as a subject for representation before Queen Elizabeth, in the Hall of Christ Church, Oxford; that in 1609-1610 Shakespeare and others were empowered to form a company of children for playing in different parts of the country; and that, in the list of plays performed by these children, was one called *Kinsmen*. This, he suggests, may have been an alteration by Shakespeare of a play called *Palamon and Arsett*, produced as early as 1594.

[1] It might be possible in some of the above lines, but not in all, to bring the accent on to the right syllable by using the triple rhythm. See vol. iii. pp. 424-9.

ear. But the eagerness of the spectators for bustling action and witty repartee made them impatient of those passages of "linked sweetness long drawn out" which, in *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, had charmed the Elizabethan theatre. Fletcher's hearers were probably delighted with the effect of swift movement produced by his frequent use of the eleven-syllable line. For his tendency is to do away with the cæsura, and so to hasten to the close of the line, as the natural halting-place; and accordingly the variation of pause, after different syllables in the middle of the verse, practised by Shakespeare and Beaumont, almost disappears in Fletcher. The effect may be observed in any of those passages I have previously cited. I cannot think this metrical innovation was an improvement. One verse in Fletcher follows another with the restless succession of waves of the sea, and the general movement is buoyant and animated. But we miss the sense of measured repose that the ear demands; moreover the rhythm almost inevitably produces two most unpleasing mannerisms. In order to make up the proper number of syllables the poet often places at the end of a line, where by the scansion emphasis is impossible, a word which by the sense requires to be emphasised; and, on the other hand, the necessities of the scansion often cause him to throw the emphasis on the wrong word. The following instances of these faults are all taken from the opening scene in *Valentinian*, which consists of only about one hundred lines. In illustration of the first fault we find :—

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>
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> The calling of a bawd to be a strange
> A wise and subtle calling.
>
> I take it 'tis no bóy's *play*.

As examples of the second fault we have—

'Tis in our power
(Unless we fear that apes can tutor 's) to
Be masters of our manners: what need I
Affect another's gait, which is not catching
When there is faith? or to be fond upon
Another's way of speech, when by mine own
I may be reasonably conceived, saved too,
Speaking it truly? why am I bound
By any generous bond to follow him
Follows his tailor, haply so long until
The followed make pursuit? or let me know
Why mine own barber is unblest, with him
My poor chin too, for 'tis not scissored just
To such a favourite's glass? what canon is there,
That does command my rapier from my hip
To dangle 't in my hand, or to go tip-toe
Before the street be foul? Either I am
The fore-horse in the team, or I am none
That draw i' the sequent trace.[1]

But in the second act, when the two friends are discoursing in prison, the character of Palamon appears completely altered:—

You have made me
(I thank you, cousin Arcite) almost wanton
With my captivity what a misery
It is to live abroad, and everywhere!
'Tis like a beast methinks: I find the Court here,
I am sure, a more content and all those pleasures,
That won the wills of men to vanity,
I see through now, and am sufficient
To tell the world 'tis but a gaudy shadow,
That old Time, as he passes by, takes with him.
What had we been, old in the court of Creon,
When sin is justice, lust and ignorance
The virtues of the great ones? Cousin Arcite,
Had not the loving gods found their place for us,
We had died as they do, its old men, unwept,
And had their epitaphs, the people's curses.[2]

It seems to me that we may take these variations in the character of Palamon in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a kind of allegory of the characters of Shakespeare and Fletcher, and of their respective influence on the progress of the English drama. For in the passage from the first

[1] *Palamon and Arcite*, Act i. Sc. 2. [2] *Ibid.* Act ii. Sc. 1.

act we can hardly fail to recognise the deep, powerful, sarcastic, and somewhat misanthropic thought, as well as the sometimes harsh and enigmatic style, of the author of *Timon*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and the Sonnets. It is Shakespeare in his latest mood. He looks out on the society about him with the eyes of one who has suffered deeply, both in the relations of private friendship and from the criticism of the world; and the spectacle of injustice, hypocrisy, and vice which he beholds perhaps disposes him to feel the reasonableness of Arcite's advice to retire from the world and its vanity An additional incentive to this course is the feeling that he is no longer in perfect touch with the audience in the theatre. There the taste of the Court is beginning to prevail over that of the people. The wit of the dialogue that springs out of "the ladies' questions and the fool's replies" now appears old fashioned: even the profound and tragic philosophy of *Hamlet* and *Othello* is losing ground in comparison with the *coups de theatre* of *The Maid's Tragedy*; while the enthusiastic flights of eloquence characteristic of Hotspur, sometimes no doubt not far removed from the bombast of Pistol, are disparaged by the cold critics on the stage as "a huffing part."[1] Something of all this had probably pushed Shakespeare into the obscure and enigmatic manner that prevails in *Coriolanus*, and in parts of *The Winter's Tale*; and as he saw others gaining upon him in the race for the public favour, the proud consciousness of his own transcendent merits may have found utterance sometimes philosophically, as in the dialogue between Achilles and Ulysses, in *Troilus and Cressida*, and sometimes disdainfully, as in the rough satire of Palamon in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. He supports himself against the conventional judgment of the world by the sense of greatness and superiority: "I am that I am."

The Palamon of Fletcher shows none of this rugged strength of resistance: he speaks with the feminine fervour of the poet who created him. Fletcher abandoned himself unreservedly to the current of life in his age. He reflected

[1] *Knight of the Burning Pestle*, Induction.

the brilliancy, the wit, the vivid colour and movement which he saw on the surface of Court society, without ever pausing to "revolve the sad vicissitude of things." It was his aim to amuse the audience in the theatre, but never to lift it above itself. Whatever the majority of the moment chose to prescribe, whether as the rule of fashion or as the canon of the stage, he was ready to accept and imitate. There were times when the conscience, which was so powerful a principle in his sensitive and emotional nature, caused him to recoil from the corruption of the times, and to embody conceptions of abstract and impossible virtue. And if, as Dyce supposes, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was one of his latest works, we may take the monastic sentiment, breathed into the speech of Palamon, as a genuine expression of the author's emotion. If in the foregoing pages any of my readers think that too severe a standard of judgment is applied to the work of a poet so vivacious, so versatile, so interesting, and, when all is said, so great an ornament of our literature, I would ask him to remember that, for at least two generations in the history of England, Fletcher was preferred to Shakespeare.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST DAYS OF THE POETIC DRAMA: MASSINGER AND FORD

THE course of this history should have made it apparent that it was by no mere accident of genius that Shakespeare was the representative dramatist of the reign of Elizabeth, and Fletcher of the Court of James I. No doubt the imagination and invention of each poet was an all-important factor in the form of their dramas, but this was only because both Shakespeare and Fletcher understood that they must work within artistic limits determined by antecedent tradition and by the tendencies of the time. Between the poetry and the politics of the period there is a complete analogy. Fletcher grafted the Spanish style on the form of the romantic drama as it had come down to him through Shakespeare from Marlowe; James I. developed, according to his own pedantic theories, the practice of semi-absolute monarchy inherited from the last of the Tudors. We have now arrived at a period in which the seeds sown in the Court of James are ripening for the harvest of civil war, and in which all the old traditions of the English stage, springing out of Italian or Spanish romance, out of Morality or Mélodrama, are summed up in the dramatic practice of the time immediately preceding the closing of the theatres by the Puritan Parliament. The reign of Charles I. is represented in the English poetic drama by the names of Massinger and Ford.

Philip Massinger was born (probably) at Wilton in

1584. His father, Arthur Massinger, was a member of the household of Henry, second Earl of Pembroke, and seems to have been of gentle birth, for when Philip matriculated at St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, on May 14, 1602, he was entered in the books as "Sarisburiensis, generosi filius." Anthony Wood says that he occupied himself while at Oxford mainly with the reading of romances; certain it is that he took no degree, and came to London in 1606, at a time when Shakespeare's dramatic course was drawing towards its end, when Jonson's reputation was nearly at its zenith, when Marston was purveyor to the public taste for bloody melodrama, and Middleton was beginning to pour forth a series of farces based on the sketchy imitation of contemporary manners. We have unfortunately no materials for forming a judgment on the character of Massinger's early dramatic work. A number of his plays were, as late as the middle of the eighteenth century, in the possession of John Warburton, Somerset Herald, but one of Warburton's servants found them useful for lighting her master's fires, and nothing survives of them but their titles. It is known that he co-operated with other playwrights of the time. As early as about 1614 an entry in Henslowe's account book discovers him, in company with Daborne and Nathaniel Field, asking for payment on account for a play which the three had written together. And when Beaumont and Fletcher's works were published in 1647, Sir Aston Cockayne, who knew both Massinger and Fletcher well, wrote a protest in verse to H. Moseley, the bookseller:—

> In the large book of plays you late did print
> In Beaumont and in Fletcher's name, why in't
> Did you not justice give, to each his due?
> For Beaumont of those many writ but few
> And Massinger in other few.

Of Massinger's surviving plays *The Old Law* was written in company with Middleton and Rowley and *The Virgin Martyr* with the help of Dekker. These and *The Unnatural Combat* were certainly produced before 1623, and are the sole remains of the poet's earlier work.

The rest appeared in the following order:—*The Bondman* and *The Duke of Milan* in 1623; *The Parliament of Love* and *The Renegado* in 1624; *The Roman Actor* in 1626; *The Great Duke of Florence* in 1627; *The Picture* in 1629; *Believe as you List* and *The Emperor of the East* in 1631; *The Maid of Honour*, *The Fatal Dowry*, and *The City Madam* in 1632; *The Guardian* and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* in 1633; *A Very Woman* in 1634; *The Bashful Lover* in 1636. It will be seen, therefore, that all Massinger's work that has come down to us was produced either in the closing years of the reign of James I. or under Charles I. Many of his plays are preceded by dedications, addressed, in a modest but not a servile tone, to different patrons, prominent among whom is Philip, fourth Earl of Pembroke, to whose family Massinger warmly acknowledges his obligations. These dedications show that the poet valued his plays as works of literary art, unlike Fletcher, who seems to have been careless of any judgment beyond that of the spectators in the theatre. He died on March 17, 1640. His body, which was followed to the grave by many actors—he himself having been a member of the profession—was buried, like that of his friend Fletcher, in St. Saviour's, Southwark, where a window has recently been erected to his memory.

The position of Massinger in the history of the English romantic drama is unique and remarkable. He has characteristics in common with dramatists differing so widely from each other as Shakespeare, Fletcher and Jonson; but the net result of his genius is something peculiar to himself. He resembles Shakespeare in the skill with which he develops the action of his plays; but, unlike him, he almost always contrives his own plots. In this respect he follows the practice of Fletcher, from whom, however, he differs radically in the character of his dramatic design. Fletcher, like the Spanish playwrights, makes his actions intentionally intricate, and keeps up the interest by rapid and brilliant dialogue; Massinger's plots are clear, simple and intelligible, and his diction

is evidently formed with a view to stately and harmonious effect. Among all the great poets of the period he is most in sympathy with Jonson; but while the latter confines the range of his moral observation to contemporary manners, Massinger transports the imagination of his hearers into the larger regions of romance.

The most striking feature in the genius of Massinger is his deliberate revival, on the very eve of the extinction of the poetic drama, of the spirit of the old Morality, out of which the forms of English tragedy and tragi-comedy originally sprang. Every one of his plays has, as its initial motive, a fixed moral idea or situation, which determines the course of the action, the grouping of the characters, and even the style of the sentiment and diction. In a large number of them the moral is set prominently forward at the conclusion: the following, for instance, are all closing lines:—

> May we make use of
> This great example, and learn from it that
> There cannot be a want of power above
> To punish murder and unlawful love.
>
> —*The Unnatural Combat.*

> We'll give him funeral,
> And then determine of the State affairs:
> And learn from this example, There's no trust
> In a foundation that is built on lust.—*The Duke of Milan.*

> Take up his body: he in death hath paid
> For all his cruelties. Here's the difference:
> Good kings are mourned for after life; but ill,
> And such as governed only by their will,
> And not their reason, unlamented fall;
> No good man's tear shed at their funeral.
>
> —*The Roman Actor.*

> May she stand
> To all posterity a fair example
> For noble maids to imitate. Since to live
> In wealth and pleasure's common, but to part with
> Such poisoned baits is rare; there being nothing
> Upon this stage of life to be commended,
> Though well begun, till it be fully ended.
>
> —*The Maid of Honour.*

So all ends in peace now,
And to all married men be this a caution,
Which they should duly tender as their life,
Neither to dote too much, nor doubt a wife.—*The Picture.*

My grace on all, which, as I lend to you,
Return your vows to heaven, that it may please,
As it is gracious, to quench in me
All future sparks of burning jealousy.
—*The Emperor of the East.*

We are taught
By this sad precedent how just soever
Our reasons are to remedy our wrongs;
We are yet to leave them to their will and power
That to that purpose have authority.—*The Fatal Dowry.*

Make you good
Your promised reformation, and instruct
Our city dames, whom wealth makes proud, to move
In their own spheres; and willingly to confess
In their habits, manners and their highest post
A distance twixt the city and the Court.—*The City Madam.*

Not only was Massinger influenced by the spirit of the old Morality, but he seems, at the outset of his career, to have attempted to preserve its ancient forms. He trod the path followed by Dekker in *Old Fortunatus* and *The Honest Whore;* and indeed *The Virgin Martyr*, which he and Dekker produced together, shows, in many points, a stricter adherence to the lines of interludes like *The Castle of Perseverance* than either of these plays. The conflict between good and evil is represented in *The Virgin Martyr* by the struggle between the pagan Theophilus and the Christian Dorothea, of whom the former is sustained by Harpax, the Malus Angelus of the old Morality, and the latter by Angelo, the Bonus Angelus, who serves Dorothea in the garb of a page. As in *The Castle of Perseverance*, the powers of evil prevail almost to the end of the play; Dorothea is martyred, but the cause of good triumphs at the close, when her glorified spirit appears in company with Angelo; Harpax flies vanquished to Hell, and the dying Theophilus is converted to Christianity. It is scarcely to be doubted that the character of this play as a whole reflects the genius

rather of Dekker than of Massinger, and that Massinger's main contribution to it is the elevation and harmony of its diction. Dekker's hand, and the tradition of the Morality, appear also in the low dialogue of Hircius and Spungius, in which, as in *The Honest Whore*, the manners of real life are imitated on principles familiar to the English stage from the days of *Hick Scorner*. The highest abstraction and the most disgusting particularity are, in these scenes, exhibited side by side, the intention of the dramatist being to exalt the idea of virtue by the sharpest possible contrast with the actual realities of vice.

It was not so much the growing refinement of the spectators, making this kind of imitation distasteful, as an artistic perception in the poet of the rude structure of the Morality, that turned the genius of Massinger to the invention of new forms. In his later plays he abandoned completely the manner of Dekker, and worked out his moral conception by making the plot the vehicle of poetical justice. Beaumont and Fletcher had learned to arrest the attention of the theatre by concealing the nature of the *dénouement*. But, anxious only for stage effects, they were content with the representation of rapid and varying incident, without directing the movement of the drama to a moral end. Hence their plays are generally faulty in the first essential of tragedy, unity of action. Massinger, on the contrary, made every detail in the action conform to the requirements of his moral. Choosing, as a rule, for the subject of his play the operation of some violent passion,—lust, avarice, or jealousy,—he exhibits, like Marlowe, its effects on one or two leading characters, which form the pivot of the plot. Round these are grouped subsidiary personages, who either help to swell the tide of evil, or, after the manner of the Greek chorus, point out to the victims of passion, as well as to the spectators, the necessary consequences of unlawful conduct. Eventually the course of the action is brought by ingenious contrivances to a point at which the powers of evil suffer defeat; if in tragedy, by the death of the guilty agents; if in tragi-comedy or comedy,—and Massinger's

gayest comedy has in it an element of tragedy,—by the exposure of fools and knaves.

Massinger, in his transition from the manner of Dekker, was far from attaining at a single bound to this method of artistic unity. *The Unnatural Combat*, which is evidently one of the earliest of his surviving tragedies, is a dramatic illustration of the text: "Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The character in which Massinger chooses to exhibit the truth of this doctrine is made the centre of the play. When old Malefort is first introduced, the interest of the spectators is awakened in him by his manifestation of a certain elevated and heroic cast of mind, and it is increased by the fury of the combat between him and his son, which gives its title to the play, and the cause of which is left for the moment unexplained. Nor does the poet reveal the source of the monstrous and mysterious passion for his own daughter to which Malefort is subject, or of the equally horrible outrage which his daughter suffers from Montreville, his pretended friend; it is only at the close of the play that these are seen to be the judgments of Heaven on him, in consequence of the unrestrained passions of his youth, which have led him to poison his first wife, mother of his son, thus preparing the way for a second marriage with the mistress of Montreville, who becomes the mother of his daughter Theocrine. Though it be granted that Malefort's various punishments are the just retribution of his vicious selfishness, it cannot be considered that the mechanical explanation of them, furnished at the end of the play, is sufficient to weld into unity actions so apparently disconnected.

On the other hand, in *The Duke of Milan*, *The Picture*, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, *The City Madam*, *The Fatal Dowry*, and *The Maid of Honour*, Massinger's artful enforcement of the moral, by means of the plot, is exhibited in its highest perfection. The first-named of these plays may be taken as an example of the extreme care which he bestowed on the structure of his tragedies. The action represents the circumstances under which

Sforza, Duke of Milan, came to kill his virtuous wife, Marcelia. He has such a passionate fondness for her that, on the eve of setting out on a dangerous political journey, he orders his favourite, Francisco, in the event of his death, to kill her, that she may not become the wife of another. Francisco, at first sight, seems to be a villain of the same class as Iago. After the departure of the Duke he attempts to seduce Marcelia, and being repulsed with scorn, he uses his influence with his master, on his safe return home, to persuade him that the Duchess has made love to himself. The Duke, carried from inordinate fondness to overwhelming jealousy, stabs Marcelia, and his conduct, like that of Othello, might excite in the mind of the reader, who has not followed the action with close attention, mixed feelings of indignation and compassion. But this is not the intention of Massinger. Wicked as Francisco is, hints dropped almost casually throughout the play show that he is bent on a scheme of revenge, not against the Duchess, but against the Duke. It is only in the fifth act that the cause of his action is disclosed. At this point Eugenia, his sister, appears, and we find that Francisco has all along been planning vengeance on her behalf, who in earlier times had fallen a victim to the lawless passion of Sforza. Thus the Duke himself is made morally responsible for the fate which falls upon him and his: his secret sin has found him out.

It is, perhaps, not too much to say that, looking merely to the artfulness of the *dénouement* and the ingenious management of the action, the plot of *The Duke of Milan* may compare with any tragedy in the English language, with the single exception of *Othello*. Scarcely less skill is shown in the conduct of what is perhaps Massinger's best comedy, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. Curiously enough none of the editors either of Massinger or Middleton has noticed that, in this play, the poet has evidently built on the groundwork of *A Trick to Catch the Old One*. In both plays an usurious uncle has got into his hands the estate of a spendthrift nephew; in both the nephew outwits the uncle and frees himself from his

debts by pretending to be on the eve of making a marriage with a wealthy widow. But here the likeness ends. *A Trick to Catch the Old One* has no merit beyond its bustling and farcical plot. Massinger has constructed, from the hints furnished him by his predecessor, a comedy which, for power of imaginative moral conception, is worthy of being ranked with *Volpone*, while it is superior to that play in beauty of form. The fine and serious character of the poet is reflected in the art with which he has supplied the moral deficiencies of his model. Middleton was satisfied with representing a greedy usurer cheated by a clever prodigal and a vulgar courtesan. The deception practised on Overreach, with the connivance of the generous Lord Lovel, is justified (making, of course, due allowances for the necessities of the stage) by the abominable character of the knight, and by his wicked intentions with regard to his daughter; the part played by the virtuous Lady Allworth in furthering the nephew's trick is at least explained by the kindness with which the latter had treated her dead husband. In Middleton's play the spendthrift, who has none of the feelings of a gentleman, besides successfully cheating his uncle, obtains by craft the hand of an innocent and beautiful heiress. Massinger, though he saves Wellborn from the clutches of Overreach, leaves him still oppressed by a sense of shame and loss:—

> There is something else
> Beside the repossession of my land,
> And payment of my debts, that I must practise.
> I had a reputation, but 'twas lost
> In my loose course; and until I redeem it
> Some noble way, I am but half made up.[1]

At every point the comic complication of the incidents is deliberately arranged so as to meet the requirements of moral and poetical justice. It was this quality in Massinger which made his plays the object of careful study by the few dramatists who, in the eighteenth century, cultivated with success the poetical drama. Rowe, concealing the source of his inspiration, appropriated, for use in

[1] *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Act v. Sc. 1.

his own *Fair Penitent*, the whole plot of *The Fatal Dowry*; evident traces of *The Duke of Milan* are to be found in Fenton's *Mariamne* and in Young's *Revenge*. Massinger for these poets supplied a vein of moral seriousness, which Johnson declared to be wanting in Shakespeare.

> Shakespeare sacrifices [says the moralist] virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings, indeed, a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him: he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.[1]

If the account of Shakespeare's motives given in this volume be correct, it is plain that Johnson's depreciation of the morality of his plays is unjust. The cause of Shakespeare's apparent moral *nonchalance* is the intensity of the personal sympathy with which he enters into situations already provided for him in tales and histories; in other words he composed his dramas in a lyrical spirit. Massinger, on the contrary, wrote in the temper of a deliberate moralist. This satisfied Johnson's philosophical requirements, but the moral advantage was obtained by Massinger at the expense of the highest dramatic art. In all Shakespeare's plays there is an unbroken sense of nature and reality: in Massinger, as in Beaumont and Fletcher, we are haunted by the feeling of being present at a superior puppet show, the actors in which are the mouthpieces of the poet. He frequently arranges the incidents of the action for the purpose of working out the moral, in such a way as to outrage nature and probability. In *The Bondman*, for example, the secret of the real nature of the complication is preserved, in Massinger's

[1] Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare, Malone's edition of *Shakespeare*, vol i. p. 73.

usual manner, till towards the close of the action. Cleora, the heroine of the play, has been in love with Leosthenes, but has been alienated from him by his jealous temper, and has responded to the devoted affection of Marullo, or Pisander, the Bondman. The latter, in the fifth act, discovers to the spectators the motives of his conduct in such a way as to justify himself and expose the real character of Leosthenes:—

PISANDER. Look better on this virgin, and consider,
This Persian shape laid by, and she appearing
In a Greekish dress, such as when first you saw her,
If she resemble not Pisander's sister,
One called Statilia.

LEOSTHENES. 'Tis the same! My guilt
So chokes my spirits, I cannot deny
My falsehood, nor excuse it.

PISANDER. This is she,
To whom thou wert contracted: this the lady
That, when thou wert my prisoner, fairly taken
In the Spartan war, that begged thy liberty,
And with it gave herself to thee ungrateful!

STATILIA. No more, sir, I entreat you. I perceive
True sorrow in his looks, and a consent
To make me reparation in mine honour;
And then I am most happy.

PISANDER. The wrong done her,
Drew me from Thebes with a full intent to kill thee;
But this fair object met me in my fury,
And quite disarmed me. Being denied to have her
By you, my lord Archidamus, and not able
To live far from her love, the mistress of
All quaint devices, prompted me to treat
With a friend of mine, who, as a pirate, sold me
For a slave to you, my lord, and gave my sister
As a present to Cleora.[1]

Such an initial situation is improbable enough. But the action of the drama violates not only probability but morality; for, simply in order to prove the sincerity of his devotion to Cleora, Pisander, under the name of Marullo, stirs up a servile revolt in Syracuse, while the freemen of the city are absent on an expedition, and, after exposing the women of the place to indescribable horrors, gets pos-

[1] *The Bondman*, Act. v. Sc. [illegible]

session of the person of Cleora, with whom, as well as with himself, he positively gains credit for not taking a licentious advantage of his opportunities.

There is a similar fault in the structure of *The Renegado.* The moral purpose of this play is to show how the strength of religious faith can make man proof against the fear of death and the allurements of beauty, and how lapse from faith, through the weakness of the flesh, drives him into despair. Vitelli, the representative of Christian fortitude, taken prisoner by the Moors, resists all their attempts to convert him with such steadiness, that he wins over to his own faith the Moorish Princess, who seeks to seduce him with her charms. He is allowed by the viceroy, Asambeg, to marry his convert, Donusa; but both are condemned to die immediately after the ceremony. Virtue, indeed, which must somehow or other be made to triumph, appears at the beginning of the fifth act to be in hopeless difficulties, so that the *dénouement* has to be effected with surprising rapidity. Vitelli asks that he may be allowed to baptize his bride before her death. His request is granted, and Paulina, a Christian captive (sister, though the fact is unknown to the Moors, to Vitelli), feigns that she finds the spectacle so ridiculous. that, though she has hitherto steadily resisted all solicitations to change her religion, she is now ready to abandon Christianity. Asambeg, the viceroy, who is in love with her, filled with joy, grants her the reprieve of Vitelli and Donusa for twelve hours, in order that Paulina, as she puts it herself, may "have time to triumph o'er this wretched woman." She makes use of the short time at her disposal to send her brother a pack-thread, which enables him to escape from his prison by a ladder of ropes, and the play ends with the tidings being brought to Asambeg that Vitelli, his bride, and his sister, are all safely under sail in a ship provided for them by Grimaldi, the re-converted renegade. Paulina's stratagem is ridiculous, and the obvious "staginess" of the situation necessarily attenuates the fine moral effect produced by the speeches of Vitelli in the body of the play.

A still graver defect, caused by Massinger's abstract method of constructing his plays, is that his characters, being made the mere vehicles of the moral, often violate the law of moral probability. The plot of *The Picture* turns on a portrait of Sophia, the virtuous heroine, which, having magic properties, changes its colours according to the moods of the person it represents, and keeps Mathias, her husband, advised, in his absence, of the state of his wife's affection for him. The action of the play requires that, at a certain point, the picture shall become yellow, the sign of Sophia's inconstancy, and the necessary spiritual change in Sophia herself is contrived as follows:—Two abandoned courtiers have been sent by Honoria, Queen of Hungary, where Mathias is staying, to undermine the chastity of Sophia, of whose virtuous reputation the queen is jealous. They attempt to effect their purpose by reporting to Sophia the infidelity of Mathias; and she, though knowing nothing of the men, and having no evidence of the truth of their statement, chooses to believe them simply on account of the protracted absence of her husband. Having reasoned herself into a conviction of his guilt, this virtuous wife next resolves to sacrifice her own chastity for the sake of revenge!—

> Have I no spleen
> Nor anger of a woman? shall he build
> Upon my ruins, and I, unrevenged,
> Deplore his falsehood? no; with the same trash
> For which he had dishonoured me, I'll purchase
> A just revenge: I am not yet so much
> In debt to years, nor so mis-shaped, that all
> Should fly from my embraces. Chastity,
> Thou only art a name, and I renounce thee!
> I am now a servant to voluptuousness.
> Wantons of all degrees and fashions, welcome!
> You shall be entertained; and if I stray,
> Let him condemn himself, that led the way.[1]

Nemo repente fuit turpissimus, and though Shakespeare sometimes represents incredible conversions to goodness, because he does not know how to manage the

[1] *The Picture*, Act iii. Sc. 6.

dénouement otherwise, he never violates nature by supposing a change to evil like that in Sophia.

This fault in Massinger is the more to be regretted, because, in the power of creating character by observation and reflection, he is scarcely inferior to Ben Jonson. He is specially successful in depicting the waves of conflicting emotion in the dispositions of men of strong passions and weak characters, like Theodosius and Sforza; the absorbing empire of a single gigantic vice like the avarice of Sir Giles Overreach; or the rapid change in a man's nature from the tyranny of one vice to that of its opposite, such as the metamorphosis of the needy hypocrite, Luke Frugal, from a servile spendthrift into a despotic miser. Massinger's portraits of women show more delicacy of feeling and imagination than those of any English dramatist, with the exception of Shakespeare. He delights in representing the conflict in their natures between the principles of love and self-esteem. Disloyalty, as proving a want of esteem, and jealousy, as implying a distrust of their womanly purity, are both deadly sins in the eyes of the heroines whom Massinger admires the most. For offences of this kind, in husband or lover, Sophia punishes Mathias, Marcelia Sforza, Cleora Leosthenes. The most charming of all Massinger's female characters, Camiola, in *The Maid of Honour*, sacrifices her whole fortune to procure the liberation from captivity of Bertoldo, who is ungrateful enough afterwards to desert her for Aurelia. Instead of pining away, like Aspatia in *The Maid's Tragedy*, or meekly submitting to this outrage, like Juliana in *The Double Marriage*—ideal women of Beaumont and Fletcher—Camiola satisfies herself with a lofty vengeance. She might have consoled herself after the manner of Cleora, by rewarding the affection of Adorni, who loves her devotedly; but she adopts a course which leads to the most pleasing and surprising climax in any of Massinger's plays. After exhibiting, before the king, and in the presence of Aurelia, her marriage contract with Bertoldo, she releases him from his engagement, and announces that, after her experience of the world, she

intends to devote the rest of her life in a convent to the service of heaven.

I turn from the effect of the Morality on the form of Massinger's dramas, to consider the form of his dramas as reflecting his own character and the spirit of his age. His dramatic motives may be described as the exact antipodes of Marlowe's; and yet the two have in some respects a strange resemblance to each other. Both delight in the tragic representation of colossal wickedness and excessive desire; but Marlowe does so as a disciple of Machiavelli, believing in the almost boundless power of the human will; Massinger, as the intellectual heir of the old Morality writers, seeks to exhibit the supremacy of moral law. Tamburlaine, Faustus, Barabas, Guise, Mortimer, pursue their selfish objects unchecked, until they either encounter the opposition of some stronger will, or are overthrown by the mere turn of Fortune's wheel; in Overreach and Luke Frugal the excessive indulgence of a selfish passion is made the immediate cause of the final catastrophe. Marlowe's view of life is that of an atheist. There seems to be much reasonableness in Gifford's inference, from incidents in *The Renegado* and from the conclusion of *The Maid of Honour*, that Massinger was a Roman Catholic; but if he was, his religion was of that wide and philosophic kind which enabled him, like Dante, to form a clear idea of the moral order of the universe, without in any way affecting his patriotism and love of liberty.

For it is evident that most of his plays were so constructed as to allow him to reflect from an ideal point of vantage on the morals and manners of his time. He proclaims this intention very clearly in *The Roman Actor*, where Paris is made to plead before the Roman Senate for the just liberties of the stage:—

PARIS. Let a good actor, in a lofty scene,
Shew great Alcides honoured in the sweat
Of his twelve labours; or a bold Camillus
Forbidding Rome to be redeemed with gold
From the insulting Gauls; or Scipio,
After his victories, imposing tribute
On conquered Carthage: if done to the life

As if they saw their dangers and their glories,
And did partake with them in their rewards,
All that have any spark of Roman in them,
The slothful arts laid by, contend to be
Like those they see presented.

RUSTICUS. He has put
The consuls to their whisper.

PAR. But 'tis urged
That we corrupt youth, and traduce superiors.
When do we bring a vice upon the stage
That does go off unpunished? Do we teach
By the success of wicked undertakings,
Others to tread in their forbidden steps?
We show no arts of Lydian panderism,
Corinthian poisons, Persian flatteries,
But mulcted so in the conclusion, that
Even these spectators that were so inclined,
Go home changed men.[1]

Indeed this principle of dramatic allegory is often applied in a very particular manner, for the poet, keeping up the tradition of the Protestant Moralities, was in the habit of making use of the stage as a pulpit for political criticism. No dramatist of the day has so many allusions to the state of current politics as Massinger. Closely connected as he was with the Herberts,—the leaders of the opposition to the foreign policy, first of Buckingham, and afterwards of Weston,—many of the scenes in his plays, and sometimes the entire action, are intended to discredit the conduct of the Government. Dr. S. R. Gardiner has shown with great precision[2] that the plot of *Believe as You List*, in which Antiochus, King of Lower Asia, is represented as fleeing from his kingdom, and seeking help from his neighbours, is an allegory expressing under the thinnest disguise the situation of Frederick, the Elector Palatine; while Philoxenus and Flaminius, who dissuade Prusias, King of Bithynia, from interfering by arms on behalf of Antiochus, stand for Weston, the Lord Treasurer, and Coloma, the Spanish Ambassador, by whose counsels Charles was prevented from giving active assistance to his brother-in-law. It is not surprising that the Master of the Revels

[1] *The Roman Actor*, Act i. Sc. 3.

[2] *History of England*, vol. vii. p. 201; and *Contemporary Review* for August 1876.

should have refused his license to this play, though evidently the reason assigned—"because it did contain dangerous matter, as the deposing of Sebastian, King of Portugal, by Philip II., there being peace sworn between England and Spain"—was not the real one. For the deposing of Sebastian was far from being a recent event; while the poet in his prologue asks pardon for the audience if

> What's Roman here,
> Grecian, or Asiatic, draw too near
> *A late and sad example.*[1]

The very next year an allusion to the political situation, almost as direct, seems to have been allowed to pass, perhaps because the policy suggested in the drama was approved by the king. English volunteers were in that year being encouraged to join the army of Gustavus Adolphus, from whose intervention in the religious wars of Germany Charles hoped that some advantage might fall to the Elector Frederic. In *The Maid of Honour* Roberto, King of Sicily, refuses to intervene directly on behalf of Ferdinand, Duke of Urbino, who like Frederic had rashly invaded his neighbour's territory, and had been, like the Elector, shamefully defeated. Roberto argues (as James I. had done, and Charles's Ministers were now doing) that it is not right to shed his subjects' blood in a foreign quarrel; but he is not averse to any one who chooses taking part in the war:—

> To show
> My rule is gentle, and that I have feeling
> O' your master's sufferings, since these gallants, weary
> Of the happiness of peace, desire to taste
> The bitter sweets of war, we do consent
> That as adventurers and volunteers,
> No way compelled by us, they may make trial
> Of their boasted valours.
>
> BERTOLDO. We desire no more.
>
> ROB. 'Tis well; and, but my grant in this, expect not
> Assistance from me. Govern as you please
> The province you make choice of; for I vow
> By all things sacred, if that thou miscarry

[1] Prologue to *Believe as You List.* This play was first printed by Colonel Cunningham in a reprint of Gifford's edition of Massinger.

> In this rash undertaking, I will hear it
> No otherwise than as a sad disaster,
> Fallen on a stranger; nor will I esteem
> That man my subject, who, in thy extremes,
> In purse or person aid thee.[1]

Charles, it is to be presumed, saw nothing disgraceful in this dramatic reflection of his policy.

But, as a rule, the main motive of action in all Massinger's plays is a profoundly moral and philosophical view of life and human nature; a sense of the danger of will-worship; a desire for the supremacy of law. So strong was his distrust of will left without control, that even when the virtuous Charalois in *The Fatal Dowry* has taken into his own hands the punishment of his adulterous wife and her paramour, and has been acquitted by a court of justice, the poet brings him to destruction, and makes him recognise that his death is the consequence of his own act:—

> What's fallen upon me
> Is by heaven's will, because I made myself
> A judge in my own cause, without their warrant.[2]

Nothing shows more clearly the change in the social and political atmosphere since the death of James I. than the different manner in which the duty of the subject to his sovereign is treated in Fletcher and in Massinger. In the plays of the former the virtuous characters Aëcius and Archas preach the duty of passive obedience: in Massinger the moral is always intended to show the consequences of lawless conduct in a ruler. Thus Theodosius, in *The Emperor of the East*, reproves his servile courtiers for exaggerating the legitimate range of his power:—

> Cannot I be an emperor, unless
> Your wives and daughters bow to my proud lusts?
> And 'cause I ravish not their fairest buildings
> And fruitful vineyards, or what is dearest,
> From such as are my vassals, must you conclude
> I do not know the awful power and strength
> Of my prerogative? . . .

[1] *The Maid of Honour*, Act i. Sc. 1. [2] *The Fatal Dowry*, Act. v. Sc. 2.

> . . . Could your hopes
> So grossly flatter you, as to believe
> I was born and trained up as an emperor, only
> In my indulgence to give sanctuary,
> In their unjust proceedings, to the rapine
> And avarice of my grooms.[1]

And when the same emperor, yielding to his passion, has unjustly ordered the execution of the innocent Paulinus, he resists the arguments of the flatterers who would excuse him to himself:—

> Wherefore pay you
> This adoration to a sinful creature?
> I am flesh and blood as you are, sensible
> Of heat and cold, as much a slave unto
> The tyranny of my passions as the meanest
> Of my poor subjects.[2]

In the same way the current code of Honour and Love is by Massinger subjected to the higher principles of moral law. Of Honour indeed little mention is made in his plays; an evident sign that the external order and decorum, introduced by Charles I. into his Court, had suppressed the extravagances of chivalrous etiquette which had been allowed to run riot in the Court of James I. But from *The Parliament of Love* we see that the time-honoured rules, governing the intercourse between the sexes, still preserved a shadow of authority. In this play the conduct of Clarindore, the great violator of the law of chivalrous love—*Qui non celat amare non potest*—is of a sort that Beaumont and Fletcher constantly exhibit without any sense of its abominable meanness; but Massinger makes Charles, King of France, assign him and two worthy companions a punishment to which, in the days of true chivalry, they would have certainly been liable:—

> To deter
> Others by their example, from pursuing
> Unlawful lusts, that think adultery
> A sport to be oft practised; fix on them
> Two satyrs' heads; and so, in capital letters
> Their foul intents writ on their breasts, we'll have them
> Led thence through Paris; then at the court gate

[1] *The Emperor of the East*, Act ii. Sc. 1. [2] *Ibid.* Act v. Sc. 2.

> To stand three hours, when Clarindore shall make
> His recantation for the injury
> Done to the lady Bellisant; and read
> A sharp inviction, ending with a curse
> Against all such as boast of ladies' favours.[1]

Massinger rarely introduces a courtier on the stage except in an odious light. Graccho in *The Duke of Milan;* Parthenius and Aretinus in *The Roman Actor;* Fulgentio and Sylli in *The Maid of Honour;* Cleon in *The Bondman;* Timantus, Chrysapius, Gratianus, in *The Emperor of the East,* reflect the varying shades of flattery, servility, lechery, ambition, with which he seems to have been too familiar in the life about him. The sense of melancholy and disgust produced in him by his surroundings is the secret of the character of his plays. He was the chief romantic poet of the Court of Charles I., as Fletcher was of the preceding reign; but while Fletcher, carried along on the tide of exuberant life, rarely shows any distaste for his age, Massinger's plays betray a consciousness in the poet that he was holding up the dramatic mirror to a society incapable any longer of understanding the springs of noble action. Hence his rebound, from the hurrying excitement of Spanish romantic action, to the austere forms of the old Morality. Hence the moral contrivances of his invented plots, always intended to prove that "the wages of sin is death." And hence, too, those violent contrasts (contrasts obviously not inspired by the love of what is foul and monstrous for its own sake) between the ideal and the actual—the opposition, for example, of the chastity of Dorothea to the bestiality of Hircius and Spungius, of the virtue of Sophia to the debauchery of Ubaldo and Ricardo—which so often interrupt the lofty harmony of his style.

The nobility of style is one of Massinger's characteristics. His diction is a mean between that of Shakespeare and Fletcher. Without ever rivalling the sublime flights of Shakespeare's figurative eloquence, he avoids the roughness and obscurity of his late manner. Compared

[1] *The Parliament of Love,* Act v. Sc. 1.

in illustration of the mottoes assumed by certain noblemen at a tournament held at Court in that year. The first-named poem bore unmistakable marks of the school of taste in which its author had been educated. I have already shown how, at the close of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, a succession of pretentious but really third-rate poets endeavoured to attract attention to themselves by a new kind of poetic diction, characterised sometimes by violent imagery and sometimes by a vicious Latinism. The former class was represented by Barnabe Barnes, the latter by John Marston and Cyril Tourneur. Ford, a younger man than the others, was carried away by the fashion they had set, and his native turn for singularity exhibited itself grotesquely in the style of *Fame's Memorial.* The diction of this poem is ostentatiously full of Marston's pedantic Latinism, shown in the choice of such words as "oblivionising," "coronise," "invicted," "adjected," "præconion's virtue," "nobilitated," and many others of the kind that Crispinus, in *The Poetaster*, is obliged to part with so ignominiously. On the other hand, the two typical stanzas that follow plainly owe their inspiration to Barnabe Barnes's nonsense verses :—

> Here he began to taste the fragment smack,
> The catapotion of heart-easing love,
> Here he persevered to assault the wrack
> Of subtle passion, proving to disprove
> That any soil firm-settled thoughts should move.
> Here was he first who taught what should be done,
> How ladies should be loved, served, wooed and won.
>
> * * *
>
> Life? ah, no life, but soon extinguished tapers!
> Tapers? no tapers, but a burnt out light!
> Light? ah, no light, but exhalation's vapours!
> Vapours? no vapours, but ill-blended sight!
> Sight? ah, no sight, but hell's eternal night!
> A Night? no night, but picture of an elf!
> An elf? no elf, but very death itself!

So pleased was Barnabe with the art shown by his young disciple, that he broke forth into a commendatory sonnet (of fifteen lines) the authorship of which might have been detected without his name :—

> But thou, by those deserts in him provoked,
> That sung his honours, which so much exceeded,
> Whose pleasant pen in sacred water soaked
> Of Castaly, did register his worth,
> Reapest much part of honour for thy pen
> Through him, fair mirror of our Englishmen,
> Whom with due dignity thy Muse set forth.

In the maturity of his genius Ford was ready to ridicule the affectations he had once admired. The following dialogue from the opening of *The Lover's Melancholy*, between Pelias, described as "a foolish courtier," and Menaphon, who has just returned from his travels, is highly significant of the change in his taste:—

PELIAS. As I am modest, I protest 'tis strange
But is it possible?
MENAPHON. What?
PEL. To bestride
The frothy foam of Neptune's surging waves,
When blustering Boreas tosseth up the deep,
And thumps a thunder bounce?

. . .

MEN. Prithee, Pelias,
Where did'st thou learn this language?
PEL. I, this language?
Alas, sir, we that study words and forms
Of compliment, must fashion all discourse
According to the nature of the subject.[1]

Doubtless his youthful extravagance was checked by being forced to study the tastes of a theatrical audience. There is nothing to show at what date he began to write for the stage; but it is on record that one of his lost plays, *An Ill Beginning has a Good End*, was acted as early as 1613. Among others of his pieces, of which the titles alone survive, were *The Lost Fairy Knight; The Bristowe Merchant*, written in company with Dekker; *A Late Murther of a Son upon a Mother*, in which Webster was his partner; *Sir Thomas Overbury's Life and Untimely Death*, acted on the 25th November 1615; *Beauty in a Trance; The London Merchant; The Royal Combat.* The three dramas last named shared the same fate as several of Massinger's, which were destroyed, as previously mentioned, by Warburton's servant.

[1] *The Lover's Melancholy*, Act i. Sc. 1.

The titles of these plays indicate clearly enough that Ford's early attempts at dramatic composition were directed to representing the moral romance of domestic life, that he had a leaning to melodrama, and that he was closely associated with Dekker. This period of his development closed apparently with *The Sun's Darling*, written in conjunction with Dekker (acted 1624), and with *The Witch of Edmonton* (acted about 1622), in which his partners were Dekker and Rowley. The former play, styled *A Moral Masque*, probably owed its existence mainly to the author of *Old Fortunatus*: it is a dull work, and is only interesting historically, as containing an allusion in Act v. Sc. 1 to the feelings provoked by the introduction of prelacy into Scotland.

The Witch of Edmonton is a domestic melodrama of the same class as *Arden of Feversham*, being based, to all appearance, partly on some contemporary murder, the result of a bigamous marriage, and partly on the trial of Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft in 1621. It is difficult to see why these different incidents should have been brought together in one drama, as the part of the play dealing with the witch has no effect whatever on the main action, which relates to the murder. Probably the playwrights wished to avail themselves of the public interest excited by these topics, and each of them worked on the portion of the play congenial to himself without caring much about the design of his partners. Of Rowley's hand I can see but little trace; but Dekker's rollicking style is unmistakable in the characters of the rustics who figure in the play; and he is likely enough to have been the contriver of the grotesque diabolical machinery set in motion by Mother Sawyer's arts. On the other hand, the characters of Frank Thorney, the murderer, and of Sir Arthur Clarington, the one mean and vicious, yet not insensible to the voice of conscience, the other hypocritical, sensual, and cruel, are conceived with a depth of thought which is beyond Dekker, and which, joined to a certain solemnity of diction, announces the genius of the author of *The Broken Heart*. As the last, or nearly

the last, production of Ford in his first manner, this play is of singular interest, since it at once offers the strongest contrast, in the realism of its action, to the abstract character of the plots in the poet's later plays, and at the same time explains why, in his most abstract situations, Ford so often falls back upon the tricks of melodrama.

The earliest of Ford's dramas in point of publication was *The Lover's Melancholy*, printed in 1628; but it is in the highest degree improbable either that (with the exception of *The Sun's Darling*) he should have done no work for the stage between 1622 and 1628, or that he should have passed at a bound from the style of domestic melodrama to the abstract manner of *The Broken Heart*. An intermediate stage of composition must have intervened, and I have no doubt that examples of this survive in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Love's Sacrifice*. For though these two plays were not printed till 1633, it can hardly be supposed that both were written in the same year as *The Broken Heart*. In design, in structure, and in versification, they differ *toto cœlo* from that tragedy and from *The Lover's Melancholy*; on the other hand, they show unmistakable signs of the influence of *The Unnatural Combat* and *The Duke of Milan*. That they were preceded, and not followed, by these two tragedies is a reasonable inference; for something like an artistic revolution in Ford's mind would have been required to make him abandon his association with Dekker, which we know lasted till 1624. I should, therefore, date the production of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Love's Sacrifice* between 1624 or 1625 and 1628, and conclude that the manner of Ford in the period of transition is due to the influence of Massinger.

In his early work Ford, like Dekker, shows himself imbued with the spirit of the Morality, which, indeed, gives a character to the style both of *The Sun's Darling* and *The Witch of Edmonton*. But he could hardly fail to be impressed with the superior art shown by Massinger in the structure of his plays; and now, like the latter he studied to unite, in his own manner, the principle of the

Morality with that of the romance. Each poet approached the problem on a different side. Massinger sought, in the action of the romantic drama, a vehicle for the exposition of moral truths: Ford hoped, in the region of abstract morality, to enlarge the empire of romance. Massinger's purpose was to represent the tragic consequences of lawless passion: Ford analysed, with dramatic casuistry, the various tragic situations rendered possible by the effects of love. He felt how much was gained in moral elevation and intensity, by removing the action of tragedy, in Massinger's manner, from domestic associations into a romantic or historic atmosphere; with how much more freedom, for example, the various effects of love on the mind might be represented in the remote surroundings of an Italian city than in the person of a middle-class English murderer. But what he was interested in was not so much the external consequences of passion as the idea of its spiritual operation. A restless curiosity of imagination drove him to look for his subjects in the marvellous, the exceptional, even the monstrous; and, in his period of transition, he derived his suggestions from *The Unnatural Combat* and *The Duke of Milan*.

In both these dramas Massinger had represented on the stage the operation of excessive passions. If any excuse can be offered for his violation of the highest canons of art, as well as of morality, it is the solemnity of the spirit in which he treats his abominable subjects. Though he interests the spectators in the character of old Malefort, he suggests to them the horror with which he ought to be regarded, by representing him as being killed in the midst of his blasphemy by a flash of lightning. Ford's imagination, on the contrary, was kindled by the contemplation of the tragedy involved in the violence of desire incapable of receiving legitimate satisfaction. The loves of Giovanni and Annabella, restrained by the laws of God and man, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*; the love of Fernando for Bianca, forbidden by loyalty and friendship, and of Bianca for Fernando, restrained by gratitude, in *Love's Sacrifice*, interest him as a poet, not because he has

any sympathy with them, but because he is sensible of their tragic import. The victims of passion are punished in these plays, like Frank Thorney in his earlier moral melodrama; but Ford shows too much abstract curiosity in the treatment of his subject, and from almost the earliest days it was felt by judges, not erring on the side of moral severity, that the colouring of the crimes and characters of Giovanni and Annabella was over soft. This verdict is justified by the seductive beauty of such a passage as the following, which I cite to show the radical difference of style and diction between Ford's plays of the transitional period and those which I shall have to notice presently:—

FRIAR. O fearful! if thou wilt not, give me leave
To shrive her, lest she should die unabsolved.

GIOVANNI. At your best leisure, father: then she'll tell you
How dearly she doth prize my matchless love;
Then you will know what pity 'twere we two
Should have been sundered from each other's arms.
View well her face, and in that little round
You may observe a world's variety:
For colour, lips; for sweet perfumes, her breath;
For jewels, eyes; for threads of purest gold,
Hair; for delicious choice of flowers, cheeks;
Wonder in every portion of that throne.
Hear her but speak, and you will swear the spheres
Make music to the citizens in heaven.[1]

In these two plays Ford substitutes the melodramatic action of Massinger for the domestic realism of Dekker. His conduct of the action is bloody, spasmodic, and improbable. In later times his love of abstraction and mental analysis so mastered his genius that his plays, beginning with *The Lover's Melancholy*, scarcely retain even the appearance of unity and external action. It is not difficult to trace the process by which the play just mentioned gradually took shape in his mind. Its inspiring source was Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Reading there of the different forms of melancholy and madness, Ford perceived that these forces of Nature might be personified, very much in the same way as the makers of the old Moralities had allegorised the forms of virtue and vice. He then thought of an

[1] *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Act ii. Sc. 5.

action into which he might weave the melancholy of Palador, prince of Cyprus, as well as the madness of one of his chief councillors, Meleander; and he took for his plot the discovery of the secret of the melancholy and the cure of the madness. A third cause of complication was added, in the hopeless love of one of the *dramatis personæ* for a disdainful member of the royal family, to cure which the lover, Menaphon, has been sent upon his travels. As a physician was of course needed for the conduct of such an action, this necessity gave birth to the character of Corax. Other characters were placed in various relations to the central figures, and a kind of statuesque framework was thus prepared for the evolution of the action. The action itself is of necessity kept within very narrow bounds. Prince Palador's melancholy, being caused by the disappearance of Eroclea, his contracted bride, which is also the origin of the madness of, Meleander, Eroclea's father, the melancholy of the one, and the madness of the other, are to be cured by Eroclea's return. But Eroclea has been brought back to Cyprus before the play begins; the only way, therefore, to postpone the *dénouement* is to disguise her identity. She is introduced accordingly in the dress of a youth, and under the name of Parthenophil; and in this way, before she is recognised, time is given for Corax to make experiments on the prince's malady, and for the dramatist to introduce an interlude or masque in which the different kinds of melancholy specified by Burton are personified for Palador's entertainment. Parthenophil's disguise is also the cause of much confusion, attended by love and jealousy, among the other persons of the play; but everything works towards a happy conclusion.

The Lover's Melancholy proves that, on his own abstract ground, in his treatment of separate characters and situations, Ford has no superior, perhaps no equal, among the English dramatists of the second rank. An admirable delicacy of conception, a fine discrimination of all shades of feeling, above all a lofty and pathetic style,. distinguish his representation of the melancholy of the prince, of the madness of Meleander, of the discovery of her real sex by

Eroclea to Thamasta. The following beautiful extract, from the dialogue between the two persons last-named, will serve to show the radical change in Ford's diction since the composition of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*:—

PARTHENOPHIL. Lady—to shorten long excuses—time,
And safe experience, have so thoroughly armed
My apprehension with a real taste
Of your most noble nature, that to question
The least part of your bounties, or that freedom
Which heaven hath with a plenty made you rich in,
Would argue me uncivil; which is more,
Base-bred; and which is most of all, unthankful.

THAMASTA. The constant loadstone and the steel are found
In several mines; yet is there such a league
Between these minerals as if one vein
Of earth had nourished both. The gentle myrtle
Is not engraft upon an olive's stock,
Yet nature hath between them locked a secret
Of sympathy, that, being planted near,
They will, both in their branches and their roots,
Embrace each other; twines the ivy round
The well-grown oak; the vine doth court the elm;
Yet these are different plants. Parthenophil,
Consider this aright; then these slight creatures
Will fortify the reasons I should frame
For that ungrounded—as thou thinkest—affection
Which is submitted to a stranger's pity.
True love may blush when shame repents too late,
But in all actions nature yields to fate.

PARTH. Great lady, 'twere a dulness must exceed
The grossest and most sottish kind of ignorance,
Not to be sensible of your intents;
I clearly understand them Yet so much
The difference between that height and lowness,
Which doth distinguish our unequal fortunes,
Dissuades me from ambition, that I am
Humbler in my desires than love's own power
Can any way raise up[1]

The same qualities, in a more intense degree, are shown in *The Broken Heart*, and nothing can be finer than the treatment of individual situations in that play, such as the scene in which Penthea (the real heroine), who has been married against her will, proclaims her eternal separation from Orgilus, her former lover; or the one in

[1] *The Lover's Melancholy*, Act III. Sc. 2.

which Orgilus, when about to revenge himself on Ithocles, Penthea's brother, who has forced her into marriage, ironically deludes him with the appearance of friendship.

On the other hand, Ford's inferiority to Massinger in the first essential of dramatic art, the power of so combining ideas in action as to produce the illusion of reality, is nowhere more conspicuous than in these two plays. He is almost entirely without invention. His abstract situations and characters are recollections of other men's work. The secret melancholy of Prince Palador is a reminiscence of Hamlet; the madness of Meleander, the filial devotion of Cleophila, and the rough loyalty of Rhetias are suggested by the parallel relations of Lear, Cordelia, and Kent; the mistake of Thamasta as to Parthenophil's sex and Menaphon's jealousy arising from the same cause, are borrowed from the plot of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*. Nor does Ford show any ingenuity in the conduct of his actions. Like Massinger he wishes at the outset of *The Lover's Melancholy* to arouse the curiosity of the spectators as to the cause of Palador's melancholy. Corax is introduced for the sole purpose of discovering the hidden nature of the disease; yet the Prince himself is unable to keep his secret beyond the beginning of the second act, when he is obliged to make a confidant of Rhetias.

In the plot of *The Broken Heart* it is evident that the distressing scene between Orgilus and Penthea, in which the latter points out the insuperable barrier to their union, is suggested by the scene in Fletcher's *Knight of Malta*, where Oriana resists the eloquent prayers with which Miranda assails her virtue. Ford is much more tragic than his predecessor, but he has grounded himself on his example. And when the requirements of the action force him to provide *The Broken Heart* with a *dénouement*, he can think of nothing better than a vulgar melodramatic trick, which he had doubtless witnessed in Barnabe Barnes's *Devil's Charter*, produced in 1607. Indeed, nothing more dramatically absurd can be imagined than the management of the final catastrophe in *The Broken Heart*. Calantha, heiress of the kingdom of Sparta, is represented

as engaged in a dance, in the course of which she receives whispered intelligence from successive messengers, of the deaths of her father, of Penthea, and of her lover, Ithocles. She continues to dance, and is able to give orders for her coronation, though her heart is broken:—

> O my lords,
> I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,
> When one news straight came huddling on another,
> Of death! and death! and death. Still I danced forward,
> But it struck home, and here, and in an instant.
> Be such mere women who, with shrieks and outcries,
> Can vow a present end to all their sorrows,
> Yet live to court new pleasures, and outlive them:
> They are the silent griefs that cut the heart-strings;
> Let me die smiling.[1]

This mixture of abstraction and melodrama is reflected in the unreality of the characters in *The Broken Heart.* Like the personified qualities in the Morality, they are mere embodiments of the thoughts of the dramatist, and are made to say and to do whatever he pleases, in the situations he creates for them A very clear insight into Ford's abstract method of composition is obtained from the supplementary catalogue of the *dramatis personæ* of *The Broken Heart,* containing, to cite the poet's own words, "the names of the speakers fitted to their qualities."

Ithocles—Honour of Loveliness	*Groneas*—Tavern-haunter
Orgilus—Angry	*Amelus*—Trusty
Bassanes—Vexation	*Phulas*—Watchful
Armostes—an Appeaser	
Crotolon—Noise	*Calantha*—Flower of Beauty
Prophilus—Dear	*Penthea*—Complaint
Nearchus—Young Prince	*Euphranea*—Joy
Tecnicus—Artist	*Philema*—a Kiss
Hemophil—Glutton	*Grausis*—Old Beldam

PERSONS INCLUDED

Thrasus—Fierceness	*Aplotes*—Simplicity

Ford's love of abstraction and analysis grew with his advancing years, and his incapacity to invent a probable plot is apparent in his *Fancies Chaste and Noble,* acted in 1637. The action and characters of this piece are

[1] *The Broken Heart,* Act v. Sc. 3.

almost unintelligible, and the scenes intended to be comic more than ordinarily disgusting. The poet's capriciousness and contempt for the judgment of the "Philistine" portion of his audience, already betrayed in his youthful *Fame's Memorial* and several of his dedications, break out in his prologue:—

> His free invention runs but in conceit
> Of mere imaginations; there's the height
> Of what he writes; which if traduced by some,
> 'Tis well, he says; he's far enough from home.

There is something in this of Ben Jonson's attitude towards the unjudging multitude in his years of decline, and, indeed, in all Ford's work we see an admiration for the poet whose genius was grounded on the observation of humours and particularities of character. To this intellectual disdain was perhaps added in Ford a native gloominess of temper, which seems to be hinted at in the portrait painted of him by the contemporary author of *Time's Poets.*

> Deep in a dump John Forde was alone got,
> With folded arms and melancholy hat.

His last play, *The Lady's Trial*, was produced in 1638; and after this date he disappears into obscurity: nothing is known even of the year of his death. His farewell to the stage displays, in an extreme form, the characteristics which have been already described. The plot of *The Lady's Trial* is trivial. A young and beautiful woman, married to an elderly husband, being unjustly accused of infidelity by a friend of the latter, whose zeal outruns his discretion, indignant at the suspicion cast on her virtue, leaves her home, but is eventually reconciled to her husband. Ford's leading idea seems to have been to invert the situation of Othello; for Auria, the husband, remains magnanimously convinced of his wife's purity, though the accusation against her is brought by his dearest friend. The action of this tragi-comedy is no more than a series of scenes of dramatic casuistry, culminating in the episode of the Lady's Trial in the fifth act. All the different parties in the suit appear, and each

in turn puts forward such spiritual defence as seems possible in justification of his or her conduct. This "Contention" accordingly helps to exhibit in various lights the dispositions of the high-minded husband, the innocent and indignant wife, the jealous friend, the rejected but generous lover, and lastly of that favourite character with both Massinger and Ford, the disappointed but unselfish suitor. The following speeches will give the reader an idea of the drama, and will show him how far, in point of diction and versification, Ford had travelled from the style of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore.*

SPINILLA. These words raise
A lively soul in her who almost yielded
To faintness and stupidity: I thank ye:
Though prove what judge you will, till I can purge
Objections which require belief and conscience,
I have no kindred, sister, husband, friend,
Or pity for my plea.
MALFATO Call ye this welcome?
We are mistook, Castanna.
CASTANNA. Oh! my lord,
Other respects were promised.
AURIA. Said ye, lady,
"No kindred, sister, husband, friend?"
SPIN. Nor name;
With this addition—I disclaim all benefit
Of mercy from a charitable thought,
If one or all the subtleties of malice,
If any engineer of faithless discord,
If supposition for pretence in folly,
Can point out, without injury to goodness,
A likelihood of guilt in my behaviour,
Which may declare neglect in every duty,
Required, fit, or exacted.
AUR. *High and peremptory!*
The confidence is masculine.
MAL. Why not?
An honourable cause gives life to truth,
Without control.
SPIN. I can proceed; that tongue,
Whose venom, by traducing spotless honour,
Hath spread th' infection—is not more mine enemy,
Than their's, or his weak and besotted brains are,
On whom the poison of its cankered falsehood
Hath wrought for credit to so foul a mischief.

Speak, sir, the churlish voice of this combustion,
Aurelio, speak; nor, gentle sir, forbear
Ought what you know, but roundly use your eloquence,
Against a mean defendant.

MAL. He's put to't:
It seems the challenge gravels him.

AURELIO. My intelligence
Was issue of my doubts, not of my knowledge.
A self-confession may crave assistance;
Let the lady's justice, then, impose the penance.
So, in the rules of friendship, as of love,
Suspicion is not seldom an improper
Advantage for the knitting faster joints
Of faithfullest affection, by the fevers
Of casualty unloosed, where lastly error
Hath run into the toil.

SPIN. Woful satisfaction
For a divorce of hearts!

AUR. So resolute?
I shall touch nearer home: behold these hairs,
Great masters of a spirit, yet they are not,
By winter of old age, quite hid in snow;
Some messengers of time, I must acknowledge,
Amongst them took up lodging; when we first
Exchanged our faiths in wedlock, I was proud
I did prevail with one whose youth and beauty
Deserved a choice more suitable in both.
Advancement to a fortune could not court
Ambition, either on my side, or hers;
Love drove the bargain, and the truth of love
Confirmed it, I conceived. But disproportion
In years, amongst the married is a reason
For change of pleasures: whereto I reply
Our union was not forced, 'twas by consent;
So then the breach, in such a case, appears
Unpardonable:—say your thoughts.

SPIN. My thoughts
In that respect are resolute as yours;
The same; yet herein evidence of frailty
Deserved not more a separation,
Than doth charge of disloyalty, objected
Without or ground or witness: women's faults
Subject to punishments, and men's applauded,
Prescribe no laws in force.[1]

In respect of thought and sentiment this is admirable. And yet when it is viewed in connection with the com-

[1] *The Lady's Trial*, Act. v. Sc. 2.

paratively simple action, and with the lucid and harmonious diction, of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, it will probably be felt by most readers that something has been lost. In his determined pursuit of abstract thought, Ford, as the structure of *The Lady's Trial*, and still more the fantastic and almost unintelligible plot of *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, show, had strayed away from the imitation of nature into regions beyond the limits of true art.

On the other hand, a comparison of these two plays with *Perkin Warbeck* (1634) causes keen regret that Ford did not more often employ his fine genius on historical tragedy. For in this sphere the Muse of History would have saved him from his besetting poetical sins, by confining his capricious imagination within the definite limits of fact, and would at the same time have provided him with subjects on which he could exert to their full extent his great powers of spiritual analysis and the energy of his lofty style. His representation of Warbeck is truly poetical. Dupe of others, the pretender is represented believing firmly in himself and in his right, and however fortune may fail him, his noble carriage and kingly eloquence sustain him without faltering to the gallows. Ford's powers of dramatic contrast and of poetic pathos are nowhere so happily displayed as in this tragedy. The King of England, sagacious, clement, yet relentless in pursuit of a necessary policy; the King of Scotland, impulsive, chivalrous, but wanting in the steadfastness that can stand by a friend in misfortune; the beautiful figure of Lady Katharine Gordon, Warbeck's faithful wife, and the unselfish devotion of Dalyel, her disappointed lover,—all these help to sustain the action with unflagging interest and on an exalted level. And not less excellent are the meaner characters intended to bring into relief the magnanimous temper of Warbeck — the boorish counsellors who attend him; the knavish Frion who knows him to be an impostor, and the grovelling Simnel, his brother pretender, who is unable to understand how Warbeck should prefer his honour to his life. The whole

constitutes a great drama, deserving of standing in the same rank as the chronicle histories of Shakespeare.

With these two deeply interesting poets the history of the genuine romantic drama comes to a close. The contemporary dramatists, of whom there were many, were often men of more than average talent. James Shirley, in particular (1594-1666), was distinguished for the prolific ease with which he produced both tragedy and comedy. Neither class of his plays, however, shows originality. In his tragedies, such as *The Traitor* and *The Cardinal*, he follows in the melodramatic track of Webster: his lively and agreeable comedies are imitations of Beaumont and Fletcher. Richard Brome (died *circa* 1652), a pupil of Ben Jonson's, is remembered chiefly by his *Jovial Crew*, a late reproduction of the motive of *The Beggar's Bush* and perhaps a distant anticipation of *The Beggar's Opera.* William Cartwright (1611-1643), a man of brilliant literary ability, wrote several comedies, which were popular in their day, and the best of which is *The Ordinary*, a play that imitates contemporary manners with much of the vigour of Middleton, but without his grossness. Equal, or perhaps superior, to Cartwright in talent was Thomas Randolph (1605-1635), who, in *The Muses' Looking-Glass*, *Hey for Honesty*, and other plays, wrote on Ben Jonson's lines with much vigour and spirit; and another disciple of the old poet, Shackerley Marmion (1603-1639), author of *The Antiquary*, enjoyed among his contemporaries considerable reputation. But none of these poets had power enough to affect the general course of imagination, and their works are mainly interesting historically, as showing the control which the genius of Puritanism was beginning to exert even over the morals and language of the stage.

The plays of Massinger and Ford, on the contrary, have each that peculiar character which is felt to reflect the spirit both of the poet and his age. In the austere morality of the former, and the profound gloom of the latter, we seem to read the same melancholy lines, which, in the countenance of Charles I., conveyed to the imagination of the sculptor Bernini an apprehension of approach-

ing evils. There is a strange significance also in the character of their artistic motives. From the return made by Massinger towards the form of the Morality we may infer a perception in the mind of the poet, that it was impossible to advance further along the path of romantic development followed by the dramatists of the two preceding reigns. Ford's manner is still more vividly suggestive of the exhaustion of imaginative motive in the poetic drama. His disdain for his audience, the transcendental sphere of his actions, the capricious range of his fancy, often amounting almost to reverie, are all indications that he is out of sympathy with the prevalent ideals of his age. On the one side he revolts from the frivolity of the Court, on the other from the intellectual narrowness of the Puritans. "The contempt," says he, with evident reference to Prynne, "thrown on studies of this kind by such as dote on their own singularity, hath almost so outfaced invention and proscribed judgment, that it is more safe, more wise, to be suspectedly silent, than modestly confident of opinion, herein."[1] And so with a certain haughty self-esteem he turns his back on the stage, and passes into obscurity on the eve of the Civil War.

[1] Dedication to *Love's Sacrifice*.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLOSING OF THE THEATRES

IN 1625, the first year of Charles I.'s reign, a Puritan Parliament sounded a note premonitory of the stringent legislation which was to culminate in the closing of the theatres in 1642. An Act was passed to prevent the profanation of the Lord's Day by certain "unlawful exercises or pastimes used by any person or persons within their own parishes," and among these amusements was included the performance of "interludes and common plays."

The forces which expressed themselves in this Act, and which had for some time been mustering, were composed of several elements. There was in the first place what may be called the Puritanic tradition of the Church from the early ages of Christianity. St. Augustine and Salvianus, Bishop of Marseilles, in the fifth century had both borne testimony to the irreligious tendencies of the stage; Calvin in his Discipline had forbidden the attendance of the faithful at such entertainments; and the English followers of Calvin who promoted the system of Geneva enforced their doctrines by the authority of the ancient fathers. The author of a pamphlet called *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theatres* (1580) translated the sixth book of Salvianus' *De Gubernatione Dei*, in which the Bishop had passed a sweeping condemnation on all plays. He followed up his translation with a third "blast" of his own, in which he

relates how he had himself been formerly "a great affecter of that vaine art of Plaie-making"; but that he had been led "*to cal his old doings into* question, and to trie them by the true tuch of God's word," and he prays in *conclusion, with evident sincerity,* that "our Magistrates maie roote out the Memorial of wickedness from the earth." *Another playwright, Stephen Gosson, author of The School of Abuse* (1579), had set the example to the author of the *Second and Third Blast; but he, though evidently* Puritanic in his modes of thought, had based his arguments on reason alone: "*Sithens they dare not abide* the field, where the Word of God doth bidde them battayle, but run to antiquities (though nothing be more ancient than holy scriptures), I have given them a volley of profane writers to beginne with the skermishe, and doone my indevour to bite them from their holdes with their own weapons." There are signs in this pamphlet that Gosson was under the influence of professional jealousy, and he was certainly eager to make a display of his learning. There is, however, no reason to question the sincerity of his religious convictions.

Professional jealousy and religious zeal are oddly mixed in an attack made almost at the same time on the stage by John Northbrooke, minister of St. Mary de Redclyffe, Bristol, who regards the theatre as the rival of the pulpit. He says in his *Spiritus Christi Vicarius est in Terra* (1579):—

> By the long suffering and permitting of these vain plays, it *hath stricken such a blind zeal into the hearts of the people, that* they shame not to say and affirm openly that plays are as good as sermons, and that they learn as much or more at a play, than they do at God's word preached. God be merciful to this realm *of England, for we begin to have itching* ears, and loath that heavenly manna, as appeareth *by their slow and negligent coming* into sermons, and running so fast and so many into plays.

Philip Stubbes, the famous Puritan, in his *Abuses in Ailgna* [Anglia] (1583), attacked *the stage with scholastic* logic. He says:—

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Philip Stubbes, the famous Puritan, in his *Abuses in Ailgna* [Anglia] (1583), attacked the stage with scholastic logic. He says:—

All stage plays, interludes, and comedies, are either of divine or profane matter: if they be of divine matter, then are they most intolerable, or rather sacrilegious; for that the sacred word of God is to be handled reverently, gravely, and sagely, with veneration to the glorious Majesty of God which shineth therein, and not scoffingly, floutingly, and jibingly, as it is upon stages in plays and interludes without any reverence, worship, or veneration to the same. The word of our salvation, the price of Christ his blood, and the merits of his passion were not given to be derided and jested at as they be in their filthy plays and interludes on stages and scaffolds, or to be mixed and interlaced with bawdry, wanton shows, and uncomely gestures, as is used (every one knoweth) in these plays and interludes.

Of this it is to be observed that whatever may have come to be the practice in the exhibition of miracle plays after the Reformation, there is no sign whatever, in the text of the most ancient compositions of this kind, of a tendency to treat the Scriptures with irreverence; though no doubt the instinct of imitation often carried both authors and actors in the miracles to rather daring lengths. As regards secular matter in plays, Stubbes completes his "dilemma" with a bold *petitio principii*:—

Upon the other side, if their plays be of prophane matters, then tend they to the dishonour of God and nourishing of vice, both which are damnable.

It is noticeable, as showing the close co-operation bebetween the writers on the Puritan side, that these two arguments are repeated *verbatim* by the author of a pamphlet published in 1615, and entitled *A Refutation of the Apology for an Actor.* For the players on their side did not sit silent under the attacks of the Puritans. Lodge answered Gosson in *A Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays* (1580), and Thomas Heywood in 1612 produced an *Apology for Actors.* They were fairly successful in proving that the drama had always been held in honour by the civil power; but as of course neither of them was able to defend his profession from the Scriptures, they only exposed themselves to fresh assaults from their relentless antagonists: Gosson triumphantly proved that *Plays were not to be suffered in a Christian Commonweal;* and Hey-

wood wisely refrained from making any reply to the flood of logic and invective with which he was overwhelmed by his refuter.

Besides the arguments of the theologians, the players had to encounter what was perhaps a more dangerous weapon, the objections of the moralists. Randolph in his *Muses' Looking-Glass* describes with vivacity, in the character of a female Puritan, the general feeling on this subject :—

> It was a zealous prayer
> I heard a brother make concerning play-houses.
> . . . . That the Globe,
> Where's, quoth he, [illegible]
>
> He wonders how it 'scaped demolishing
> I' the time of Reformation. Lastly he wished
> The Bull might cross the Thames to the Bear Garden
> And there be soundly baited.[1]

The Cockpit in Drury Lane had a specially bad reputation, but indeed a mass of contemporary evidence shows that the manners of the playhouses in James I.'s time were such as to cause a serious scandal ; and the following description from the *Refutation of an Apology for an Actor* furnishes a comprehensive and serious indictment which it would not have been difficult for the Puritans to sustain :—

> But now to draw to the end and conclusion of my discourse, I will but only describe briefly and in few words, who for the most part they are which run madding unto plays. In general the vulgar sort in whom *Cicero pro Plancio* saith *non est concilium non ratio, non discrimen*, there is no counsel, reason, nor discretion. But to particularise some amongst all. The profane gallant to find his pleasure, the city dames to laugh at their own shame, the country clown to tell wonders when he comes home of the varieties he hath seen, the bawds to entice, the whores and courtesans to set themselves to sale, the cutpurse to steal, the pickpocket to filch, the knave to be instructed in more cosening tricks, youth to learn amorous conceits, some for one wicked purpose, some for another : none to any good intent, but all fruitlessly to misspend their time. But among any others

[1] *Muses' Looking-Glass*, Act I. Sc. I.

that go to the theatres, when shall you see an ancient citizen, a chaste matron, a modest maid, a grave senator, a wise magistrate, a just judge, a godly preacher, a religious man not blinded in ignorance, but making conscience of his ways? You shall never see any of these men at plays, for they count it shameful and ignominious, even an act of reproach that may redound unto them.

In estimating historically the value of this invective, we must make allowance for a certain air of Catonian rigour, and a very perceptible undernote of class feeling, which marks the sharp division in society between the supporters and censurers of the stage. The players were the servants of the king and of the nobility; they were in a special manner purveyors for the entertainment of the Court; and as the sympathies of the English middle-class were every day rallying in greater volume to the support of the Parliament in its approaching struggle with the hereditary powers of the Constitution, the wickedness of the fashionable world, as reflected in its amusements, took a blacker shape in the imagination of the opposite party. This sharp cleavage of interests had manifested itself towards the close of the sixteenth century, when the Martin Mar-Prelate faction, representing the fanatical Puritans, found themselves opposed in the war of pamphlets by playwrights like Lyly and Nash. Even at an earlier date the author of the *Second and Third Blast of Retrait* had shown how much of social jealousy animated the apparent advocacy of abstract religious principles:—

Let not the abuse of the Sabbath proceed further and further, and in the meantime the judge be a looker on, daring not for fear to reform their disorder till all be out of order. Alas, that private affection should so reign in the nobility, that to pleasure, as they think, their servants, they should restrain the magistrates from executing their office! What credit can return to the noble to countenance his men to exercise that quality which is not sufferable in any commonweal? Whereas it was an ancient custom that no man of honour should retain any man but such as was excellent in some one good quality or other, whereby, if occasion served, he might get his own living. Then

was every nobleman's house a commonweal in itself: but since the retaining of these caterpillars, the credit of noblemen hath decayed, and they are thought to be covetous by permitting their servants, which cannot live of themselves, and whom for nearness they will not retain, to live at the devotion or alms of other men, passing from country to country, from one gentleman's house to another, which is a kind of beggary. Who indeed, to speak more truly, are become beggars for their servants. For commonly the good will men bear to the lords makes them draw the strings of their purses to extend their liberality to them which otherwise they would not.

Indeed from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards the representation of stage plays, always encouraged by the nobility, had been vehemently opposed by the magistrates in almost every considerable city in England. In 1572 the Corporation of Leicester refused leave to the Earl of Worcester's players to act in the town; during the years 1580-1583 there were constant disputes between the Court and the City of London respecting theatrical representations in the city, the objections of the municipal authorities being mainly based on religious grounds; about the year 1590 or 1591 the City had so far prevailed that for some years the performance of plays by the scholars of St. Paul's School was suppressed. The reign of James I. was very favourable to the liberties, not to say the license, of the stage; nevertheless in 1616 the apprentices of the city showed their Puritanic sympathies by attempting to pull down the Cockpit Theatre and to destroy its "properties," while in 1619 the Lord Mayor, of his own authority, and without reference to the Privy Council, gave orders for the suppression of the Blackfriars' Theatre, though it was more than doubtful whether this did not lie beyond his jurisdiction. His bold attempt was unsuccessful, and the Blackfriars' continued to be a very popular playhouse till 1631, when the inhabitants of the neighbourhood petitioned Laud (then Bishop of London) with much urgency for the removal of the theatre, alleging the inconvenience caused to their trade by the crowding of the streets with the carriages of the fashionable spectators. A ballad on the subject, sent to

the bishop on the occasion, reflects with vivid spirit the moral objections to the theatre as a place of amusement put forward more tediously in prose both by magistrates and divines :—

> The city he approaches :
> Carts, carriages, and coaches
> Still throng him by the way :
> What shall he do I wonder,
> But make no further blunder,
> And to the place of plunder,
> The theatre and play.
>
> Here will he see a lady
> As handsome drest as may be
> And never note the players :
> Then to a house of pleasure
> Where she will take his measure ;
> He hug his hasty treasure,
> In spite of all the mayors.

All these tendencies of opinion, religious, moral, political, social, and commercial, were combined in Prynne's *Histriomastix.* This book, begun in 1624, when the author was only twenty-four years of age, but not published till 1632-1633, grew to more than 1000 pages, into which Prynne poured all the hostile allusions to the stage which he had collected in the course of his voluminous reading. It was dedicated to the Benchers of Lincoln's Inn, of which society Prynne was a member, and which was already distinguished for Calvinistic zeal; to the students of the Inns of Court ; and to the Christian reader. Following the example of Stephen Gosson, Prynne divides his treatise, like a play, into parts, acts, scenes, diversified with choruses. He carries on the tradition of his predecessors in the scholastic manner in which he treats his subject, refutes Heywood's already refuted *Apology for Actors*, and founds an argument on the "penitence" of Gosson and of the author of *The Second and Third Blasts of Retrait.* But he goes beyond both of these pamphleteers in violence ; and an allusion to the women actors who in 1629 had been fetched out of France

for the pleasure of Henrietta Maria, brought down upon him the anger of the Court. He was condemned by the High Commissioner's Court, which ordered his book to be burned, himself to be expelled from the bar and Lincoln's Inn, to be deprived of his degree at Oxford, to stand in the pillory, to lose part of both ears, and to be imprisoned for life, besides paying a fine of £5000.

In the same year that *Histriomastix* was published several other incidents marked the growing division between the Court and the Puritanic parties in regard to theatrical performances. The Mayor and Corporation of Banbury ventured to arrest and imprison players who were authorised to act by Royal Patent. On the demand of the Privy Council the offenders were handed over to a Messenger of the Star Chamber, which seems not to have considered them guilty of any serious offence, as they were almost immediately set at liberty, on giving a bond that they would be forthcoming whenever called upon. Almost at the same time Chief Justice Richardson made an order, while on circuit, for the total suppression of Wakes and Church-Ales—an order which was considered to be an encroachment on the authority of the ecclesiastical power, in consequence of which the Chief Justice was censured by the Privy Council and compelled to cancel his order, while the Council directed that "The Declaration regarding Sports and Pastimes on the Sabbath," issued in 1618, should be ratified and republished. Great offence was thereby given to the Puritans, whose growing influence in the country is indicated by the severity with which the Master of the Revels exercised his censorship over the language of the drama. In 1633 Sir Henry Herbert, who then filled this office, forbade the performance of Fletcher's *Tamer Tamed* on account of its "oaths, profaneness, and ribaldry"; while the Privy Council, as we have already seen, called the players to account for the profane language they had introduced into *The Magnetic Lady.* The latter endeavoured to excuse themselves by laying the blame on the laxity of the Master of the Revels, who, however, proved,

when summoned before the Council, that the fault was none of his. Stirred into activity by the force of public opinion, he made so many excisions of interjections from a drama submitted to him in the following year that the author, Davenant, complained to the king, by whom it was decided that such words as *Faith*, *Death*, *Slight*, might be reckoned as asseverations, not oaths.

It may be added that the plays produced during the decade immediately preceding the outbreak of the Civil War, particularly those of Shirley and Cartwright, are comparatively free from the indecency which disfigures the drama in the reign of James I.; on the other hand, the spirit of the age is reflected in numerous political allusions, which more than once provoked the interference of authority. The last entry made by Herbert in his Register runs as follows: "June 1642—Received of Mr. Kirke, for a new play, which I burnt for the ribaldry and offence that was in it, £2; Received of Mr. Kirke for another new play, called *The Irish Rebellion*, the 8th of June 1642, £2." He adds: "Here ended my allowance of plays, for the war began in August 1642."

The triumph of Puritanism over the drama is characteristically expressed in the Ordinance of the Lords and Commons concerning stage plays, issued on 2nd September 1642:—

> Whereas the distressed estate of Ireland, steeped in her own blood, and the distracted estate of England, threatened with a cloud of blood by a civil war, call for all possible means, to appease and avert the wrath of God appearing in these judgments: amongst which fasting and prayer, having been often tried to be very effectual, have been lately and are still enjoined; and whereas public sports do not well agree with public calamities, nor public stage plays with the seasons of humiliation, this being an exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being spectacles of pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious mirth and levity: it is therefore thought fit, and ordained by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament assembled, that whilst these sad causes and set-times of humiliation do continue, public stage plays shall cease and be forborne. Instead of which are recommended to the people of this land the profitable and seasonable considerations of repentance, reconciliation, and peace

with God, which probably will produce outward peace and prosperity, and bring again times of joy and gladness to these nations.

This ordinance does not seem to have been very strictly obeyed, and five years later another ordinance was passed giving authority to the Lord Mayor and the Justices of the Peace to enter any playhouse within their jurisdiction, and imprison any actor whom they may find, or who may be credibly reported to them as performing on the stage. In 1648 a third ordinance was published, whereby actors taking part in a stage play were made liable to fine and imprisonment for a first, and to whipping for a second offence. An Act that followed almost immediately, further authorised "the Lord Mayor, Justices of the Peace, and Sheriffs to pull down and demolish all stage galleries, seats, and boxes, to seize for the benefit of the poor all money collected at the performance, and to impose a fine of five shillings on each of the spectators."

In spite of these pains and penalties, players were still found in 1648 braving the terrors of the law, while, as late as 1653, strolling actors in the provinces seem to have given exhibitions of favourite plays without any interruption from the authorities. Still as a public institution the poetical drama was undoubtedly dead Dramatists and players, deprived of their accustomed means of livelihood, naturally took sides with the party with which they were connected by old association, and many of them experienced the stern realities of battle, which they had so often represented to the public in the mimic combats of the stage. Shirley, a favourite of the Earl of Newcastle, shared with his patron the fortunes of the disastrous campaign that closed with Marston Moor. William Trigg, who in 1636 was one of the king's players in the progress when Charles visited Oxford, took service in the royal army, and obtained a captain's commission, while another actor, Robinson, fell by the hand of Harrison at the storming of Basing House. When the king's

cause was lost the militant players silently dispersed, and either supporting themselves by some sort of handicraft, or strolling with illicit but unregarded companies in country districts, awaited the return of times more favourable to the exercise of their talents and their profession.[1]

[1] For fuller details as to the closing of the theatres, see Collier's *History of Dramatic Poetry*, vol ii. pp. 33-50.

CHAPTER XIV

DRYDEN AND THE ROMANTIC DRAMA AFTER THE RESTORATION

THE course and character of the romantic drama after the Restoration is summed up in the history of a single great poet. In the skill with which he divined the direction of the public taste; in the flexible invention with which he adapted the resources of his art to new conditions; in the splendour and harmony of his verse; and in the lucidity of his judgment, as displayed in his dialectical criticism, no dramatist of the time could for a moment compare with Dryden. Others, no doubt, attained success and distinction, but it was by working on designs of which Dryden had sketched the first example: most of his contemporaries stood to him in the relation of scholar or antagonist. I shall content myself, therefore, in this chapter with tracing the varieties of his experiments on the stage, noticing, as I go, the poets who were most intimately connected with his progress; and when I have finished the survey of his work, I shall examine the general causes of the decline of the Romantic drama.

Dryden's plays fall into four groups: (i) Heroic Plays; (ii.) Imitations of Shakespeare; (iii.) Political Dramas; (iv) Comedies. Of his own practice in each class he has fortunately left us accounts which enable us to understand clearly the general movement of the public taste.

(i.) In order to appreciate the character of the Heroic Play, it is necessary, in the first place, to form a clear

on the English stage up to the time of Massinger, were obviously unfitted; new arts had to be introduced, new devices invented, to meet the change of popular taste: the result was the Heroic Play, the origin of which is thus described by Dryden:—

> For heroic plays, in which only I have used rhyme without the mixture of prose, the first light we had of them on the English theatre was from the late Sir William Davenant. It being forbidden him in the rebellious times to act tragedies and comedies, because they contained matter of scandal to those good people who could more easily dispossess their lawful sovereign than endure a wanton jest, he was forced to turn his thoughts another way, and to introduce the examples of moral virtue writ in verse, and performed in recitative music. The original of this music, and of the scenes which adorned his work, he had from the Italian operas; but he heightened his characters, as I may probably imagine, from the example of Corneille and some French poets.[1]

In outline this is an accurate description of the origin of the Heroic Play; but it scarcely indicates with sufficient precision the nature of the revolution in dramatic art implied in Davenant's opera, *The* Siege *of Rhodes*, performed in 1658. Davenant was a vigorous and fertile poet, nearly of the same age as Shirley, whom he resembled in character and capacity. In the declining days of the old drama he had shown himself equally ready to supply the stage with a melodrama, a comedy, or a masque after the traditional English pattern; but when the theatres were closed and the royal cause was lost, he retired to France, where he studied the structure of the opera as it was practised by Lulli and Quinault, and also of the drama as it was handled by Corneille. On his return to England he turned his experience to practical account, and introduced to his audience many more of the arts of the French stage than Dryden, his disciple, seems disposed to allow. Not only did he, as the latter says, cast his ideas into the mould of the Italian opera, but he was the first (or nearly the first) to employ the device of scene-

[1] *Works of John Dryden* (Scott, 1821), vol. iv. pp. 17, 18.

shifting, and to pay attention to perspective in scene-painting; he brought down the orchestra from a gallery into its present position immediately under the stage; and he established the practice of representing female parts by actresses instead of, as under the old *régime*, by boys and young men. Mechanically, these were improvements; but they implied a great decay of imagination in the spectators. Shakespeare had said confidently to his audience:—

> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
> Into a thousand parts divide one man,
> And make imaginary puissance.
> Think when we talk of horses that you see them
> Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
> For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings.[1]

What Davenant in effect told the spectators was that they were to use their eyes and ears, and that, if their senses were skilfully cheated by the exact imitation of external things, the ideal truth of action and character was a matter of secondary importance. This lesson was conveyed to willing minds. Restricting the flight of their imagination to suit the more exact representation of the external scene, the spectators gradually approximated their ideas of what was dramatically probable to the French standard of unity in time and place, and began to censure the liberties claimed in this respect by the dramatists of the old romantic school. They criticised also the idea of romantic action, as it had been understood by Marlowe, and developed by Marston and Chapman in furious melodramas, representing the energetic working of the human will in situations giving full play to all the wild and irregular passions of the heart. Work of this kind had satisfied the conception of action proper to a period of popular exaltation, but had neither substance nor form sufficient to withstand the analysis of critical reason now brought to bear upon it.

In a playhouse (says Dryden) everything contributes to impose upon the judgment; the lights, the scenes, the habits,

[1] *King Henry V.*, First Chorus.

and above all the grace of action, which is commonly the best where there is the most need of it, surprise the audience and cast a mist upon their understandings, not unlike the cunning of a juggler, who is always staring us in the face and overwhelming us with gibberish, only that he may gain the opportunity of making the cleaner conveyance of his trick. But these falser beauties of the stage are no more lasting than a rainbow; when the actor ceases to shine upon them, when he gilds them no longer with his reflection, they vanish in a twinkling. I have sometimes considered, *in the reading*, what was become of those glaring colours which amazed me in *Bussy d'Amboys* upon the theatre; but when I had taken up what I supposed to be a fallen star, I found I had been cozened with a jelly; nothing but a cold dull mass, which glittered no longer than it was shooting; a dwarfish thought dressed up in gigantic words, repetition in abundance, looseness of expression, and gross hyperboles; the sense of one line expanded prodigiously into ten; and, to sum up all, incorrect English, and a hideous mingle of false poetry and true nonsense; or at best a scantling of wit, which lay gasping for life and groaning beneath a heap of rubbish.[1]

Criticism of this kind enables us to understand the nature of the problem which Dryden attempted to solve by his invention of the Heroic Play. He wanted to construct a species of drama which should be at the same time romantic and reasonable. Davenant had sought to make his imitations of men's actions appear gigantic by all the stage effects peculiar to opera. But his genuine inclination, as a descendant of Fletcher, discovers itself in his rule that a heroic play "ought to be dressed in a more familiar and easy shape, more fitted to the common actions and passions of human life, and, in short, more like a glass of nature, showing us ourselves in our ordinary habits, and figuring a more practical virtue to us, than was done by the ancients or moderns."[2] It is difficult to understand on what principle Davenant thought that plays of this kind could be justly called "heroic." Dryden, on the contrary, clearly perceived that, if the "heroic" type of character was to be exhibited on the stage, it

[1] Epistle Dedicatory to *The Spanish Friar*. For Bussy d'Ambois, see pp. 242-244.

[2] Dryden's *Essay on Heroic Plays*. *Works* (1821), vol. iv. p. 19.

must be, in some way or other, clearly marked off from the ordinary level of human nature both in thought and language. Hence, while Davenant was, as his successor says, content to tell, in unadorned diction, a story which he "neither filled with persons nor varied with accidents," Dryden strove in his "heroic" plays to represent actions and passions of colossal greatness, and to separate his characters still more sharply from the common herd by the style of his rhyming verse.

He has confided to us with perfect frankness the secret of his method of composition both in the representation of character and the choice of poetical diction. As regards the first point, he seems to have thought that he could construct a hero by bringing together a number of abstract qualities in a single person. Thus he says, describing the character of Almanzor in *The Conquest of Granada:* "The first image I had of him was from the Achilles of Homer; the next from Tasso's Rinaldo (who was a copy of the former); and the third from the Artaban of Monsieur Calpranede, who has imitated both." For a character of this kind he rightly felt that blank verse of the kind which Fletcher had brought into fashion was an inadequate vehicle of expression; and in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* he put into the mouth of Lisideius an admirable argument in justification of his own practice:—

The plot, the characters, the wit, the passions, the description, are all exalted above the level of common converse, as high as the imagination of the poet can carry them, with proportion to verisimility. Tragedy, we know, is wont to image to us the minds and fortunes of noble persons, and to pourtray these exactly; heroic rhyme is nearest nature, as being the noblest kind of modern verse.—

> Indignatur enim privatis, et prope socco
> Dignis, carminibus, narrari cœna Thyestæ,

says Horace; and in another place:—

> Effutire leves indigna tragœdia versus.

Blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a poem, nay more, for a paper of verses; but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is, by Aristotle, in the dispute

betwixt the epic poesy and the dramatic, for many reasons he there alleges, ranked above it.

The fundamental idea underlying the romantic play of the Restoration period may therefore be described as uniting the principle of romantic action conceived by Marlowe with the epigrammatic mode of expression employed by Corneille. According to Dryden, the hero of the romantic drama must be a man of vast, abnormal, irresistible power of will, and with physical and intellectual qualities equal to carry out his conceptions in action. Almanzor, his typical hero, is in many respects the counterpart of the older Tamburlaine. The following speeches of this person will show how closely Dryden's conception of *virtù* and of fortune at first sight resembles Marlowe's:—

> No: there is a necessity in fate
> Why still the brave bold man is fortunate;
> He keeps his object ever full in sight,
> And that assurance holds him firm and right.
> True, 'tis a narrow path that leads to bliss,
> But right before there is no precipice:
> Fear makes men look aside and then their footing miss.[1]

Or

> Fate after him below with pain did move.[2]

Or

> Would heaven had quite forgot me this one day,
> But fate's yet hot——
> I'll make it take a beat another way.[3]

Or

> Spite of myself I'll stay, fight, love, despair;
> And I can do all this because I dare.[4]

So far Dryden's conception of romantic action and character fell in with the tradition of the English stage, and many passages in his critical prefaces show that he believed he had invented in his heroic plays a species of national drama superior in many respects to the work of his predecessors. He speaks in a tone of mingled reverence and disparagement of the plays of Shakespeare,

[1] *Conquest of Granada*, Part i. Act iv. Sc. 2.
[2] *Ibid.* Part i. Act ii. Sc. 1. [3] *Ibid.* Act iii. Sc. 1.
[4] *Ibid.* Part ii. Act ii. Sc. 3.

Ben Jonson, and Fletcher on the one hand, and of the French dramatic practice on the other, praising Shakespeare for the greatness of his ideas, but blaming him for the incorrectness of his style, and Fletcher for the irregularity of his plots; while, though admitting the superior correctness of the French drama, he insists on its inferiority to the English in boldness of conception and execution.[1] When, however, we look below the surface of Dryden's own plays, we see that they are nearer in spirit to the French manner than to the English. The groundwork of English dramatic practice, as shown in Marlowe and Shakespeare, is the representation of the action of the human will in various interesting situations. In these poets the imitation of the resolution or irresolution of the will, of the conflict between good and evil in man, is the result of a lyrical, enthusiastic, yet philosophical way of thinking about Nature. Tamburlaine, Faustus, Barabas, Guise, Mortimer, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Iago, Claudio, Angelo, are above all things *men*; the greatness or meanness of their outward circumstances is not an essential element in the dramatic situation; though it is easy enough to see that the whole tendency of Shakespeare's philosophy of life was strongly in favour of monarchical government.

The French drama, on the contrary, is in its essence political. A mistaken interpretation of a passage in Aristotle's *Poetics* had led Corneille and his followers to think that tragedy should represent only the fortunes of kings or other great persons; and as this principle accorded well with the movement in the nation at large towards a centralised absolutism, the stage furnished a natural pulpit for the propagation of monarchical doctrines. Dryden, in the person of Neander, blames the French poets, in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, for their long "discourses of reasons of state." Yet he himself follows closely in their footsteps. All his heroic plays are fundamentally political in character, and reflect the spirit of

[1] *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* Speech of Neander. *Works* (1821), vol. xv. pp. 336-361.

monarchical reaction in the beginning of Charles II.'s reign. The *virtù* of Almanzor in *The Conquest of Granada* is a political argument in favour of absolutism expressed in verse. The factions of the Abencerrages and Zegrys in the same play allegorise the parties of Roundheads and Cavaliers, soon to be transformed into Whigs and Tories; and the poet's exaltation of the character of Almanzor does not simply spring from admiration for the power inherent in the energy of the individual will, but from contempt for the essential anarchy of the crowd. In *The Conquest of Granada* he represents Boabdelin, the effeminate Moorish king, vainly endeavouring to appease the factions in his country by persuasion. Almanzor interferes:—

ALMANZOR. What subjects will precarious kings regard?
A beggar speaks too softly to be heard.
Lay down your arms—'tis I command you now.
Do it—or, by our prophet's soul, I vow
My hands shall right your king on him I seize:
Now let me see whose look but disobeys.
ALL. Long live King Mahomet Boabdelin!
ALMAN. No more! but hushed as midnight silence go.
He will not have your acclamations now.
Hence, you unthinking crowd!
[*The common people go off on both parties.*]
Empire! thou poor and despicable thing,
When such as these make and unmake a king!
ABDALLA. How much of virtue lies in one great soul,
Whose single force can multitudes control![1]

Weak monarchs, mere constitutional puppets, unable to control the people, content themselves with abusing them. Thus Shah Jehan, in *Aureng Zebe*, exhausted by excesses in the harem, finds an excuse for his own indolence in the worthlessness of his subjects:—

Believe me, son, and needless trouble spare,
'Tis a base world, and is not worth our care;
The vulgar, a scarce animated clod,
Ne'er pleased with aught above them, prince or God:[2]

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[1] *Conquest of Granada*, Part i. Act i. Sc. 1.
[2] *Aureng Zebe*, Act iii. Sc. 1.

and in the same spirit Boabdelin, in *The Conquest of Granada*, throws all the blame of his own cowardice on the popular form of his government :—

> See what the many-headed beast demands!
> Curst is that king whose honour's in their hands!
> In senates either they too slowly grant,
> Or saucily refuse to aid my want.
> And when their thrift has ruined me in war,
> They call their insolence my want of care.[1]

To this pusillanimous reasoning Dryden opposes the resolution of the hero, who will be absolute or nothing. Abdalla, in *The Conquest of Granada*, advises Almanzor to compromise with Zulema, the chief of the most powerful faction :—

> ABDALLA. Your slighting Zulema this very hour
> Will take ten thousand subjects from your power
> ALMANZOR. What are ten thousand subjects such as they?
> If I am scorned—I'll take myself away.[2]

The only freedom worth having is the freedom of the hero to execute his own will :—

> No man has more contempt than I of breath;
> But whence hast thou the right to give me death?
> Obeyed as sovereign by thy subjects be,
> But know that I alone am king of me!
> I am as free as Nature first made man,
> Ere the base laws of servitude began,
> When wild in woods the noble savage ran.[3]

The Great Mogul and the Emperor of Mexico, in Dryden's representation of them, have alike formed their philosophy on Hobbes.

In *The Indian Emperor* the very lovers talk politics :—

> ALIBECH. When kings grow stubborn, slothful, or unwise,
> Each private man for public good should rise.
> GUYOMAR. Take heed, fair maid, how monarchs you accuse;
> Such reasons none but impious rebels use.
> Those who to empire by dark paths aspire
> Still plead a call to what they most desire
> But kings by free consent their kingdoms take,

[1] *Conquest of Granada*, Part ii. Act i. Sc. 2.
[2] *Ibid.* Part i. Act iii. Sc. 1.
[3] *Ibid.* Part i. Act i. Sc. 1.

Strict as those sacred ties which nuptials make.
And whate'er faults in princes time reveal,
None can be judge where can be no appeal.[1]

If it be asked, as it reasonably may, why these sentiments need be put into the mouth of lovers, the answer is that love, like politics, was an essential ingredient in the composition of those French plays which, in spite of Dryden's professions, governed his practice rather than the English tradition. Love, in Marlowe's tragedies, is, if not an unknown passion, at least one which is mastered by the powerful will of the hero, who deserves praise for *virtù;* and Tamburlaine prides himself on trampling under foot feelings to which even the gods are subject. Love plays but a subordinate part either in Shakespeare's historical plays, or in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. To Fletcher, indeed, who imitated the Spaniards, love was an indispensable part of the machinery by which a play is worked; but the heroic drama, as conceived by Dryden, is opposed in almost all its features to the tragic and comic style of Fletcher. Among the French love is the universal passion with which every other is connected, and which by its natural operation produces casuistical conflicts between inclination and honour; and these again give opportunities to the French dramatists of displaying their genius for rhetorical declamation or debate. So too it is with Dryden. All the "romance" in his heroic plays turns on some question of love. Historical kings or princes may be his heroes, but they are so much under the sway of amorous emotion that history counts for little in the evolution of the drama. Though the nominal subject of *Aureng Zebe* is the revolt of his sons against the aged emperor, Shah Jehan, the real interest is concentrated in the romantic relations between Aureng Zebe and Nourmahal, which can scarcely be said to be characteristic of Eastern manners. Though the natives of Mexico are not averse to human sacrifices, they are able to dissect their feelings with all the refinements of French gallantry. Almanzor, who, like Achilles, can put whole

[1] *Indian Emperor*, Act iv. Sc. 2.

armies to flight, loves Almahide on the same heroic scale; while almost every conceivable combination of amorous cross-purposes is crowded into the plot of *Tyrannic Love.* In this play the cruel emperor Maximin is hopelessly in love with St. Catherine of Alexandria. His empress, Berenice, is in love with Porphyrius, who has been contracted against his will by the emperor to Valeria, daughter of the latter; while she, who loves Porphyrius, is herself vainly beloved by Placidius. So little did actors or audience believe in the dramatic reality of the situation, that after Nell Gwyn, who took the part of Valeria, had died in what was meant to be a pathetic scene, and her body was about to be removed, she was made to start to her feet, exclaiming:—

> *Hold! Are you mad, you damned, confounded dog?*
> I am to rise and speak the epilogue.

As regards dramatic style, Dryden was convinced that in his heroic verse he was developing the traditions of the English stage upon new and legitimate lines. Nor is it to be denied that between the rants of Almanzor and the rants of Tamburlaine there is, in the midst of their divergency, something in common. Both are the natural reflection of the *virtù* which each dramatist conceives to be the proper characteristic of his hero. But Dryden appears not to have noticed how, in the interval between Marlowe and himself, Shakespeare had mitigated the "huffing" style of the early romantic school by assigning it only to characters such as Hotspur, in whose mouth it was appropriate, or to such speakers as might be supposed to feel the urgency of vehement passion. Fletcher's principle was to assimilate the language of the stage as closely as possible to the language of actual life; so that Dryden, by reviving the primitive manner in a new form, was opposing the natural tendency of things. Nevertheless, he piques himself on the adoption in tragedy of rhyme, and the language appropriate to rhyme, as the sole path of novelty, by following which it was still open to an English dramatist to equal, and even excel, his predecessors.

And here, as he never hesitates, when it suits his purpose, to be inconsistent in his reasoning, he grounds himself on the example of the French, pretending that "Corneille, the most judicious of the French poets, is still varying the same sense an hundred ways, and dwelling eternally on the same subject, though confined by rhyme," which, he argues, may therefore be accepted as an instrument of dramatic expression not less effective than the old blank verse.[1]

In adapting rhyme to the English drama, Dryden, though the practice was of course not absolutely new, must be allowed the merit of invention. Considered apart from his thought, his verse never fails to charm us by its strength, clearness, and harmony. Nay more: when he lights upon a situation or a sentiment congenial to his imagination, he expresses it in a manner which it would be impossible to surpass, as in the conflicting views of life presented as follows by Aureng Zebe and Nourmahal:—

AURENG ZEBE. When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat;
Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit;
Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay:
To-morrow's falser than the former day;
Lies worse, and while it says we shall be blest
With some new joys, cuts off what we possest.
Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
Yet all hope pleasure in what yet remain;
And, from the dregs of life, think to receive
What the first sprightly running could not give.
I'm tired of waiting for this chemic gold,
Which fools us young, and beggars us when old.
NOURMAHAL. 'Tis not for nothing that we life pursue;
It pays our hopes with something still that's new:
Each day's a mistress, unenjoyed before;
Like travellers, we're pleased with seeing more.
Did you but know what joys your way attend,
You would not hurry to your journey's end.[2]

When, however, Dryden lifts his manner into keeping with his great stage personages, and, like Seneca and the French dramatic poets, strives after dramatic points, it is at once manifest that he is departing from the English

[1] *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*: Speech of Neander. *Works*, vol. xv. pp. 367-382.
[2] *Aureng Zebe*, Act iv. Sc. 1.

tradition, even as illustrated in the bombast of Marlowe's Tamburlaine. Though the rants and extravagances of Tamburlaine are prodigious, *they do not seem altogether* unnatural: they sometimes take the fatal step that *carries* them into the region which is the antipodes of the sublime, but they are quite as often highly poetical; whereas it may safely be affirmed that Almanzor, *in his rodomontade, is* uniformly ridiculous. The laughter that his speeches provoke arises from the seriousness with which he gives utterance to the most extravagant thoughts in pointed and epigrammatic language; *and the same is true of all* Dryden's heroic characters, who invariably elevate their diction by using the clearest imagery to convey incredible ideas. Porphyrius, threatened with death by the tyrant *Maximin, expresses the "resolution" of a hero as follows:—*

> Where'er thou stand'st, I'll level at that place
> My gushing blood, and spout it in thy face.
> Thus not by marriage we our blood will join:
> Nay more, my arms shall throw my head at thine.[1]

Almanzor, required by Boabdelin to surrender Almahide's scarf, replies:—

> I'll hold it fast
> *As life, and when life's gone, I'll hold this last;*
> And if thou tak'st it after I am slain,
> I'll send my ghost to fetch it back again.[2]

Ghosts, according to Dryden, can perform yet more incredible feats. *Almanzor seeks to impress his mistress's* imagination with the vengeance he will exact should she prove unfaithful.—

> If not a subject, then a ghost I'll be,
> And from a ghost you know no place is free.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> *When in your lover's arms you sleep at night,*
> I'll glide in cold betwixt, and claim my right.[3]

Not all ghosts, however, act so *"grimly" as this. Berenice* promises her lover, Porphyrius:—

[1] *Tyrannic Love*, Act iv. Sc. 2.
[2] *Conquest of Granada*, Part ii. Act iii. Sc. 1.
[3] *Ibid* Part i. Act iv. Sc. 2.

> And when at last, in pity, you will die,
> I'll watch your birth of immortality;
> Then, turtle-like, I'll to my mate repair,
> And teach you your first flight in open air.[1]

No extravagance seems to have been violent enough to disturb the gravity of an English audience in the years immediately following the Restoration. In *The Indian Queen*, Acacis, son of the usurping Queen Zempoalla, stabs himself; whereupon his mother exclaims:—

> Some water, there! Not one stirs from his place:
> I'll use my tears to sprinkle on his face.[2]

The climax of absurdity in the heroic style is reached in the closing scene of *Aureng Zebe*, in which Dryden, in all seriousness, as it appears, attempts to outdo Seneca, who, in the ravings of his *Hercules Œtæus*, had shown himself equally ambitious of excelling the self-restrained exhibition of mortal agony represented in the *Trachiniæ* of Sophocles. Nourmahal, wife of the aged emperor, Shah Jehan, has poisoned herself:—

> I burn, I more than burn; I am all fire.
> See how my mouth and nostrils flame expire!
> I'll not come near myself——
> Now I'm a burning lake, it rolls and flows;
> I'll rush, and pour it all upon my foes.
> Pull, pull that reverend piece of timber near:
> Throw't on—'tis dry—'twill burn—
> Ha, ha! how my old husband crackles there!
> Keep him down, keep him down; turn him about:
> I know him,—he'll but whiz, and straight go out.
> Fan me, ye winds: what, not one breath of air?
> I'll burn them all, and yet have flame to spare.
> Quench me: pour on whole rivers: 'tis in vain:
> Morat stands there to drive them back again:
> With those huge bellows in his hands, he blows
> New fire into my head: my brain-pan glows.
> See! see! there's Aureng Zebe too takes his part,
> But he blows all his fire into my heart.[3]

The exaggeration both of conception and expression,

[1] *Tyrannic Love*, Act iii. Sc. 1. [2] *Indian Queen*, Act v. Sc. 1.
[3] *Aureng Zebe*, Act v. Sc. 1.

characteristic of the English Heroic Play, is the effect of two causes which are always at work in art simultaneously—the desire for novelty and the decay of invention. Romance on the stage ran through almost precisely the same course of development as romance in literature. As the taste for the histories of King Arthur and Charlemagne, which vividly reflect the ideas and manners of chivalry, was followed by a taste for the abstract and impossible adventures of Amadis de Gaul and his successors, and, afterwards, for the gallant allegories of Mlle. Scuderi, so the representation of lofty actions and characters in the English drama, founded on national history or legend, was exchanged for a reflection of the artificial manners of a modern Court, masquerading in the dress of antiquity. Yet, blind though the majority of the spectators were to the artificiality of sentiment in these plays, it would have been strange if passages like the dying speech of Nourmahal had been universally admired in a nation possessing so strong a sense of humour as the English; and that the more intellectual portion of society in the reign of Charles II. was alive to the artistic errors of the Heroic Drama is amply shown in *The Rehearsal*.

This famous play, the work of George Villiers, second Duke of Buckingham, and others, was begun as early as 1665, with a view of ridiculing the operatic style of Sir William Davenant, who was introduced into the composition under the name of Bilbao. Davenant, however, died in 1668, and the authors in consequence turned their ridicule mainly upon Dryden, who, as the popular author of *The Conquest of Granada*, *Tyrannic Love*, and other heroic plays, had become the representative of the fashionable manner. Bilbao was replaced by Bayes. To a certain extent *The Rehearsal* is injured as a work of art by this fluctuation of motive. It lacks unity of design. The satire would have been more effective if it had been aimed entirely at a single person and a particular class of play: as it is, the authors direct their ridicule against such obscure authors as Edward Howard and Sir Robert

Stapylton quite as often as against Dryden; they criticise not only the bombastic style of the heroic drama, but also the defects of comedies for which Bayes was not responsible, pointing out, moreover, the absurdities in Davenant's opera, *The Siege of Rhodes*, which Dryden in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* had excluded from the province of the legitimate drama. They largely rely on their parodies, and as, for the modern reader, nothing can be more comic than the original passages that were travestied, much of the satire has ceased to be amusing. Still the framework of the whole play, with its prosy *dramatis personæ*, Bayes, Smith, and Johnson, the prototypes of Puff, Sneer, Dangle, and Plagiary in *The Critic*, is admirable; and much of the dialogue is full of humour, particularly the delightful scene exhibiting the combat between Love and Honour in the mind of Prince Volscius, one of Bayes' "heroic" characters. The Prince has called for his boots, proclaiming his intention of going out of town:—

Enter PARTHENOPE.

VOLSCIUS. Bless me! how frail are all my best resolves!
How in a moment is my purpose changed!
Too soon I thought myself secure from Love.
Fair madam, give me leave to ask her name,
Who does so gently rob me of my fame?
For I should meet the Army out of Town,
And if I fail must hazard my renown.

PARTHENOPE. My mother, sir, sells ale by the Town-Walls,
And me her dear Parthenope she calls.

VOLSC. Can vulgar vestments high-born beauty shroud?
"Thou bringst the morning pictured in a cloud."[1]

BAYES. The morning pictured in a cloud! Ah, Gadsookers, what a conceit is there!

PARTH. Give you good even, sir.

VOLSC. O inauspicious stars! that I was born
To sudden love, and to more sudden scorn!

AMARYLLIS, CLORIS. How! Prince Volscius in love? Ha, ha, ha!

SMITH. Sure, Mr. Bayes, we have lost some jest here that they laugh at so.

---

[1] A parody of a line in *The Siege of Rhodes*.

BAYES. Why, did you not observe? He first resolves to go out of town, and then, as he is pulling on his boots, falls in love. Ha, ha, ha!

SMITH. O, I did not observe. That indeed is a very good jest.

BAYES. Here now you shall see a combat betwixt Love and Honour. An ancient author has made a whole play on't;[1] but I have despatched it all in this scene.

VOLSCIUS (*sitting down*) How has my passion made me Cupid's scoff!
This hasty boot is on, the other off,
And sullen lies, with amorous design
To quit loud fame, and make that beauty mine.
My legs, the emblem of my various thought,
Show to what sad distraction I am brought.
Sometimes with stubborn Honour, like this boot,
My mind is guarded, and resolved to do't:
Sometimes again, that very mind, by Love
Disarmèd, like this other leg does prove.

JOHNSON. What pains Mr. Bayes takes to act this speech himself!

SMITH. Ay, the fool, I see, is mightily transported with it.

VOLSC. Shall I to Honour or to Love give way?
Go on, cries Honour; tender Love says, nay:
Honour aloud commands, pluck both boots on;
But softer Love does whisper, put on none.
What shall I do? What conduct shall I find,
To lead me through the twilight of my mind?
For as bright day, with black approach of night
Contending, makes a doubtful puzzling light;
So does my Honour and my Love together
Puzzle me so, I can resolve for neither.[2]

The argument of the fifth act is also an admirable burlesque on the point of Honour illustrated in such plays as *Tyrannic Love*:—

Cloris at length, being sensible of Prince Prettyman's passion, consents to marry him; but, just as they are going to church, Prince Prettyman, meeting by chance with old Joan, the chandler's widow, and remembering it was she that brought him acquainted with Cloris, out of a high point of honour breaks off his match with Cloris, and marries old Joan. Upon which Cloris, in despair, drowns herself: and Prince Prettyman discontentedly walks by the river-side.

[1] Sir W. Davenant's *Love and Honour*, published in 1649. But the scene that follows is a parody of several passages from Sir R. Fanshawe's translation of *Querer pro Solo Querer*, and Francis Quarles' *Virgin Widow*.

[2] *Rehearsal*, Act iii. Sc. 2.

(ii.) From the examples of the heroic style that have been cited, the reader will at once perceive that this satirical criticism was essentially sound and just, and though Dryden took no notice of the ridicule, it is probable that it produced an effect upon him, for in the Prologue to *Aureng Zebe*, the play which closes with the amazing rant of Nourmahal, he says, with the frank disdain which always makes his style delightful:—

> Our author by experience finds it true,
> 'Tis much more hard to please himself than you,
> And out of no feigned modesty this day
> Damns his laborious trifle of a play.
> Not that it's worse than what before he writ,
> But he has now another taste of wit;
> And to confess a truth, though out of time,
> Grows weary of his long-loved mistress rhyme.
> Passion's too fierce to be in fetters bound,
> And nature flies him like enchanted ground:
> What verse can do he has performed in this,
> Which he presumes the most correct of his;
> But, spite of all his pride, a secret shame
> Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name:
> Awed when he hears his godlike Romans rage,
> He, in a just despair, would quit the stage;
> And to an age less polished, more unskilled,
> Does, with disdain, the foremost honours yield:
> As with the greater dead he dares not strive,
> He would not match his verse with those who live:
> Let him retire, betwixt two ages cast,
> The first of this and hindmost of the last.

He did not, however, retire, but rather chose to match himself with Shakespeare. In 1678 he produced *All for Love*, which is substantially a recast of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and in the following year he applied the same method to the *Troilus and Cressida* of the elder dramatist. None of his performances are more characteristic of the genius of Dryden, or more illustrative of the revolution of taste in the theatre. The two plays of Shakespeare were among the latest productions of that great poet, and were written at a time when his inclination to turn the drama into a vehicle for the expression of his personal sentiments was most powerful. His intense sympathy

with the character and situation of Antony is lyrically reflected in the dramatic force and abruptness of his style; while the character of Cleopatra, with its mixture of caprice, passion, selfishness, and devotion, is a study of such subtlety, even among the Shakespearian women, as to suggest that it was at least coloured by actual experience and observation. On the other hand, the play is not so well adapted as others of Shakespeare's for representation on the stage. The interest of the action is centred in the fortunes of the two leading personages, but its evolution is so much interrupted by constant changes of scene, that the course of events is difficult to follow. Insensible to the true source of inspiration in the play, Dryden thought that its theatrical points might be made more effective. And perhaps from his point of view he was right.

All for Love is a gallicised rendering of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The scene is from first to last laid in Alexandria. The main theme, the conflict between Passion and Honour, is after the French manner kept steadily in view. The particular dramatic situations, in which the problem is handled, are so skilfully arranged that the rhetorical point can always be readily appreciated by the spectators. Little fault can be found with the structure of the play, from a mechanical point of view. But in the spiritual representation of character and passion its inferiority to *Antony and Cleopatra* is immense. In every word of Shakespeare's tragedy the emotion of Antony and his mistress burns and glows: every word of *All for Love*, on the contrary, is part of a moral argument in verse. The arguments are admirably opposed to each other, but they do not arise so much out of the character and conduct of the persons supposed to be speaking, as out of the skill and invention of the poet. Dryden's Antony is a feeble, vacillating sensualist, who changes his mind according as he is swayed by what seems the strongest consideration of the moment. At the opening of the play he appears in debate with Ventidius, who represents the cause of Roman patriotism: as the result of this, he is converted to the side of Honour. Cleopatra, appearing at

enumerates all her infidelities in language of which the following is a specimen:—

> When I beheld you first it was in Egypt;
> Ere Cæsar saw your eyes, you gave me love,
> And were too young to know it; that I settled
> Your father in his throne was for your sake;
> I left the acknowledgment of time to ripen;
> Cæsar stept in, and, with a greedy hand,
> Plucked the green fruit, ere the first blush of red,
> Yet cleaving to the bough. He was my lord,
> And was, beside, too great for me to rival;
> But I deserved you first, though he enjoyed you.[1]

Observe again the character of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, as shown in her reply.

> CLEOPATRA. Have you done yet?
> ANTONY. Alack, our terrene moon
> Is now eclipsed, and it portends alone
> The fall of Antony!
> CLEOPATRA. I must stay his time.
> ANTONY. To flatter Cæsar, would you mingle eyes
> With one that ties his points?
> CLEOPATRA. Not know me yet?
> ANTONY. Cold-hearted toward me?
> CLEOPATRA. Ah, dear, if I be so
> From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
> And poison it in the source, and the first stone
> Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
> Dissolve my life! The next Cæsarion smite!
> Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the discandying of this pelleted storm
> Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey![2]

This is one of the passages in Shakespeare which Dryden would most strongly have censured for the violence of its metaphors. Yet it is in keeping with the termagant temper of Cleopatra. Compare it with the legal sophistry of Dryden's French-mannered heroine:—

> CLEOPATRA. You seem grieved
> (And therein you are kind) that Cæsar first

[1] *All for Love*, Act ii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iii. Sc. 13.

Enjoyed my love, though you deserved it better:
I grieve for that, my lord, much more than you;
For had I first been yours, it would have saved
My second choice:
And ne'er had been but yours. But Cæsar first,
You say, possessed my love. Not so, my lord:
He first possessed my person—you, my love:
Cæsar loved me, but I loved Antony.
If I endured him after, 'twas because
I judged it due to the first name of men;
And, half constrained, I gave as to a tyrant
What he would take by force.[1]

A strong light is thrown by this on the spirit in which Dryden recast (1679) Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida.* Of that play he says:—

The author seems to have begun it with some fire; the characters of Pandarus and Thersites are promising enough; but as if he grew weary of his task, after an entrance or two, he lets them fall; and the latter part of the tragedy is nothing but a confusion of drums and trumpets, excursions and alarms. The chief persons who give name to the tragedy are left alive; Cressida is false, and is not punished.[2]

Evidently Dryden did not in the least understand the lyric mood in which Shakespeare composed his *Troilus and Cressida:* he failed to see that Shakespeare chose the subject because it was one which furnished him with an opportunity of giving a reflection of his own views of the world, of human nature, and of the ways of society; that it was, in fact, one of those plays in which the lyric overpowers the dramatic motive. To say that there is nothing in the latter part of the tragedy but a confusion of drums and trumpets is untrue, for Shakespeare's finest writing is to be found in such scenes as that between Achilles and Ulysses, in the debate on the surrender of Helen, and in the representation of Cressida's fickleness to Troilus. But it is true that Shakespeare, after his manner, takes little trouble with the concluding scenes, and that Dryden has conformed the play to the requirements of the con-

[1] *All for Love,* Act ii. Sc. 1.
[2] Preface to *Troilus and Cressida. Works,* vol. vi. p. 239.

temporary stage in his most characteristic style. In other words, he has altered the plot by transforming the character of Cressida to suit the prevailing French ideal of sentimental fidelity in the female sex. Cressida in his play is not guilty of the crime against female honour, and when she is accused of it, she, in proper stage fashion, kills herself. All the other scenes in the play (the second title of which is *Truth found too late*) work up towards this climax, and Dryden, not seeing how inconsistent it is to bring a person like Pandarus into close association with his (comparatively) virtuous heroine, has taken immense pains to accentuate and amplify this character and that of Thersites. At the same time he reduces to insignificant proportions the figures of Achilles and Ulysses, which stand out so prominently in Shakespeare's play.

In Dryden's *Œdipus* also there are several recollections of Shakespeare, though the plot of the tragedy is mainly taken from Sophocles, and though its spirit resembles Seneca's or Corneille's, whom Dryden affects to disparage. Like Seneca, he imagines a scene between Œdipus and Jocasta after their relationship is discovered; like Corneille, he introduces a love-plot. Eurydice, in love with Adrastus, is desired by the tyrant Creon, who threatens her with death if she does not yield to him. This gives an opportunity for an imitation of the famous passage in *Measure for Measure*, "Ay, but to die and go we know not where."[1] Œdipus also appears walking in his sleep like Lady Macbeth,[2] while the incantation of Tiresias by which he calls up the ghost of Laius is imitated from the opening scene in the same tragedy.[3]

In his transformations of Shakespeare, no less than in his heroic plays, Dryden displays all the brilliant gifts of an inventor. He had sketched in outline the structure of a new species of composition, half opera, half drama, congenial to the artificial, over-refined taste of the age in which he

[1] Compare Dryden's *Œdipus*, Act iii. Sc. 1: "The thought of death to one near death is dreadful," etc.
[2] *Ibid* Act ii. Sc. 1. This act was written by Lee.
[3] *Ibid.* Act. iii. Sc. 1.

lived, and he had illuminated this unreal world with the splendours of his own large and versatile mind. But Nature, while she had amply endowed him with the resources of intellect, had denied him the power of ideal creation. So long as his *dramatis personæ* can be kept within the sphere of oratory, debate, satire, or reflection, he delights us with the greatness of his style, but when they have to speak or act in such a manner as to move the passions, and especially the passion of love, he fails completely. His eminently masculine mind had no sympathy with the softer emotions, and as women were now the most influential factors in the formation of public taste, it is no wonder that the plays of the greatest poet of the day often missed their effect. He was far surpassed in popularity by two of his disciples, of whose genius at this point it may be fitting to give some account.

Nathaniel Lee, the son of Dr. Richard Lee, a clergyman, who took the Parliamentary side in the Civil War, but afterwards recanted his republican opinions, was born, probably, in 1653. Educated at Westminster and afterwards at Trinity College, Cambridge, he went upon the stage, as an actor, in 1672, but breaking down through nervousness in the part of Duncan in *Macbeth*, he gave up all thoughts of a profession for which he was in many respects admirably suited. He had great natural sensibility, and this showed itself in his voice and manner. "If I could only act your plays as you read them!" said Mohun to him on one occasion; and the same emotional quality is reproduced in his plays. He began to write for the stage in 1675, in which year appeared his *Nero*, which was followed in 1676 by *Gloriana* and *Sophonisba*, all three of these plays being composed in Dryden's heroic manner and in rhyme. When Dryden, in his prologue to *Aureng Zebe*, threw out a hint of his approaching change of style, Lee acted on the suggestion, and his *Rival Queens*, produced in 1677, anticipated Dryden's adoption of blank verse. This famous play was followed in 1678 by *Mithridates*, and in 1680 by *Theodosius*, both of which were almost as popular as their immediate predecessor,

and kept possession of the stage for over a hundred years. In the preface to the former, Lee avowed himself an imitator of the older English poets: "I have endeavoured in this tragedy," says he, "to mix Shakespeare with Fletcher: the thought of the former for majesty and true Roman greatness, and the softness and passionate expressions of the latter, which make up half the beauties, are never to be matched." In *Theodosius* he treats the same subject as Massinger. Other of Lee's dramas in blank verse were *Cæsar Borgia* (1680), *Lucius Junius Brutus* (1681), and *Constantine the Great* (1684). After this date the loose and dissipated habits to which he had long been inclined mastered him; he lost his senses, and was for five years confined in Bedlam. On his release, he was granted a pension of £10 a year, but he fell again into his drunken ways, and returning to his lodgings one night, in a state of intoxication, is said, by Oldys, to have died in the snow.[1] He was buried in the Church of St. Clement's Danes, 6th May 1692.

The power of Lee over the spectators in the theatre is acknowledged by his contemporaries. Dryden says of him in his generous manner:—

> Such praise is yours while you the passions move,
> That 'tis no longer feigned, 'tis real love,
> When Nature triumphs over wretched Art;
> We only warm the head, but you the heart;
> Always you warm; and if the rising year,
> As in hot seasons, brings the sun too near,
> 'Tis but to make your fragrant spices blow,
> Which in our cooler climates will not grow.[2]

It must be observed, however, that this power is confined to the stage. In the action and structure of Lee's dramas, everything was operatic. Like the French romanticists and Dryden, he chose his subjects from history, but conceived them in the spirit and manner of modern gallantry. His heroes, including even Alexander and Hannibal, are effeminate fops. Here and there they

[1] MS notes to Langbaine's account of the English Dramatists, p 320. Looking, however, to the date of his burial, this seems improbable.
[2] Epistle to Mr. Lee on *The Rival Queens.*

rave about deeds of arms in a vein of tumid enthusiasm, as in the famous passage in *The Rival Queens*, where Alexander exclaims:—

> Can none remember? Yes, I know all must—
> When Glory, like the dazzling eagle, stood
> Perched on my bever on the Granick flood;
> When Fortune's self my standard trembling bore,
> And the pale Fates stood frighted on the shore;
> When the immortals on the billows rode,
> And I myself appeared the leading god.[1]

But what, as a rule, gave Lee the command over the effeminate imagination of his audience was the ranting sensibility he threw into his love scenes. In his *Mithridates*, the old king of Pontus is represented as enamoured of Semandra, who is contracted to his son Ziphares; he threatens that if she either receives the latter like a lover, or gives him any explanation of the change in her behaviour, he shall be put to death. The valiant Ziphares, who has been fighting his father's battles with the Romans, returns from the wars, and asks his mistress for a kiss. She refuses him, and the following dialogue ensues:—

> SEMANDRA. Your life's too precious; I resolve against it!
> Not for ten thousand worlds—what was I saying? (*Aside*)
> What shall I say? Live, live, thou lost Ziphares!
> ZIPHARES. No, thou perfidious maid, thou wretched beauty,
> Ziphares loves thee still; so well he loves thee,
> That he will die to rid thee of a torment.
> Where are thy vows? O think upon thy father,
> How will it cut him this thy cruel change,
> And break his aged heart? Or e'er he dies,
> Think, if this kindled rage should execute
> What he has sworn, to hack thy beauteous limbs,
> Tear thy false flesh into a thousand pieces——
> SEM. If that were all my fear!
> ZIPH. What, hardened? O my stars!
> So quickly perfect in the cursed trade?
> I shall go mad with this imagination.
> O heart! tho' Heaven had oped the pregnant clouds,
> And teemed with all the never-erring gods,

[1] *Rival Queens*, Act ii. Sc. 1.

To swear on earth Semandra had been false,
I would not have believed.[1]

Sometimes the rant was softened into the expression of genuine tenderness, as when Varanes, Prince of Persia, is represented, hesitating whether to marry the low-born Athenais:—

VARANES. O Athenais! what shall I say or do,
To gain the thing I wish?
ATHENAIS. What's that, my lord?
VAR. Thus to approach thee still, thus to behold thee—
Yet there is more.
ATH. My lord, I dare not hear you.
VAR. Why dost thou frown at what thou dost not know?
'Tis an imagination which ne'er pierced thee;
Yet as 'tis ravishing, 'tis full of honour.
ATH. I must not doubt you, sir; but oh! I tremble
To think if Isdigerdes should behold you,
Should hear you thus protesting to a maid
Of no degree but virtue in the world.
VAR. No more of this, no more; for I disdain
All pomp, when thou art by. Far be the noise
Of kings and courts from us, whose gentle souls
Our kinder stars have steered another way.
Free as the forest birds we'll pair together,
Without remembering who our fathers were;
Fly to the arbours, grots, and flowery meads,
And in soft murmurs interchange our souls;
Together drink the crystal of the stream,
Or taste the yellow fruit which autumn yields;
And when the golden evening calls us home,
Wing to our downy nest and sleep till morn.[2]

Opera-like as the whole situation is, it may be imagined how the passionate language of scenes like these, of which there are many examples in Lee, accompanied by the gestures of the admirable actors and beautiful actresses of the period, must have roused the emotions of the courtly audiences in the Caroline theatre.

Thomas Otway, whose character and fortunes bore in many respects a striking resemblance to Lee's, followed a different course in art. He was the son of Humphrey

[1] *Mithridates*, Act iii. Sc. 2.
[2] *Theodosius*, Act. ii. Sc. 1.

Otway, Curate of Trotton (afterwards Rector of Woolbeding), in Sussex, and was born in 1651. Educated at Winchester, he was entered in 1669 as a commoner at Christ Church, Oxford, but leaving the University without a degree, aspired to the stage, where, a part having been assigned to him in Mrs. Behn's *Jealous Bridegroom*, he failed, through nervousness, like Lee, to make his appearance. In his first two plays, *Alcibiades* (1675) and *Don Carlos* (1676), he adopted the prevailing heroic style, and the latter is said to have been very successful, but after translating in 1677 a tragedy (Racine's *Berenice*) and a comedy (Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*) from the French, and writing in 1678 an original comedy, *Friendship in Fashion*, he followed the example of Dryden, who was now endeavouring to imitate Shakespeare. His *History and Fall of Caius Marius* combines with about the same amount of history as Lee's *Mithridates* the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*, and the profound admiration for Shakespeare in the mind of the young poet is expressed in his prologue:—

> Like greedy beggars that steal sheaves away,
> You'll find he's rifled him of half a play.
> Amidst his baser dross you'll see it shine,
> Most beautiful, amazing, and divine.

Inspired by his study of Shakespeare, he produced the two tragedies on which his fame depends, *The Orphan*, in 1680, and *Venice Preserved*, in 1681. After this he wrote only a single comedy, *The Soldier's Fortune*, in two parts, the first of which appeared in 1681, the second in 1685.

His fortunes had meanwhile been chequered and his manners dissipated. By the help of his patron, the Earl of Plymouth, he had obtained a commission as cornet in a regiment of troops sent to Flanders in 1678; but these, after a few months' service, were disbanded, and Otway, returning to England, fell desperately in love with Mrs. Barry, the beautiful actress, by whom his advances were rejected. The passionate letters which he wrote to her were afterwards published. The manner of his death in

1685 is variously related. Johnson was informed that, being on the point of starvation, he was choked with a piece of bread given him out of charity in an ordinary. Dennis, who was his contemporary, relates that he pursued to Dover an enemy who had traduced the memory of his friend Shadwell, and on his return died in a spunging-house of a chill which he had contracted.

Otway's power lay, like that of Euripides, in the pathos with which he conceived situations closely resembling those of real life. He judiciously followed Shakespeare in grounding his two best dramas on existing tales or histories, and he departed from the "heroic" principle in taking his chief characters from the middle rank of society. In *The Orphan*, for example, the action is merely a dramatic rendering of a story he had found in a collection of tales called *English Adventures by a Person of Honour*. Monimia, an orphan, left under the protection of an old retired courtier, is loved by the two sons of the latter, Castalio and Polydore, and is herself in love with the elder, to whom she is in time secretly married. The brothers are devoted to each other, though love for Monimia is the strongest feeling in their breasts, and it is agreed between them that each shall pursue his court to her in his own way. Castalio, who has concealed from his brother his intention of marrying Monimia, after the marriage makes an appointment with his wife, that, at a given signal, he shall be admitted to her chamber at night; but their conversation being overheard by Polydore, the latter, in the belief that his brother, like himself, is animated by illegitimate desires, contrives to obtain admission in Castalio's stead. In *Venice Preserved* the whole interest of the plot turns on the love of Jaffier for Belvidera, whom he has married without her father's consent. Being reduced to extremes of poverty, Jaffier, at the instigation of his friend Pierre, joins in a conspiracy to overthrow the government of Venice and assassinate the senators. He communicates the plot to his wife; and partly at her entreaty on behalf of her father, who is among the intended victims, partly to revenge himself on one of the

conspirators, who has attempted the seduction of Belvidera, discloses it to the Senate.

Here, it will be readily seen, are materials for strong dramatic situations, and these were skilfully developed by Otway in the manner best suited to his own powers. Dryden, who for some time disliked Otway as a friend of Shadwell, says of him in the preface to one of his own late works :—

> I will not defend everything in his *Venice Preserved*, but I must bear this testimony to his memory, that the passions are truly touched in it, though perhaps there is something to be desired both in the grounds of them, and in the height and elegance of expression; but nature is there, which is the greatest beauty.[1]

The oblique censure on the style of this poet is repeated by Pope, who says that

> Otway failed to polish or refine.[2]

It simply implies, however, that Otway did not attempt to elevate his style in Dryden's "heroic" manner, but kept a level adapted to the nature of his subject. Nothing can be more truly expressive of the situation in *The Orphan* than the unaffected simplicity of the language, and Mrs. Barry declared that she could never utter without tears the "Oh, Castalio!" of Monimia, when she learns the deceit that Polydore has practised upon her. The care which Otway bestowed on those flatter portions of the play, which needed to be raised by description, may be judged by the following vivid picture of an old witch gathering sticks :—

> CHAMONT. I spied a wrinkled hag with age grown double,
> Picking dry sticks, and mumbling to herself;
> Her eyes with scalding rheum were galled and red;
> Cold palsy shook her head, her hands seemed withered,
> And on her crooked shoulders she had wrapt
> The tattered remnant of an old striped hanging,
> Which served to keep her carcass from the cold;
> So there was nothing of a piece about her:

[1] Preface to Fresnoy's *Art of Painting*. [2] *Epistle to Augustus*, 278.

> Her lower weeds were all o'er coarsely patched
> With different-coloured rags—black, red, white, yellow,
> And seemed to speak variety of wretchedness.[1]

Nor could any touch increase the intensity of the pathos in which Belvidera, in the spirit of the "Nut-brown Maid," proclaims her readiness to endure all extremes of suffering in the company of Jaffier:—

> JAFFIER. Canst thou bear cold and hunger? Can these limbs,
> Framed for the tender offices of love,
> Endure the bitter gripes of smarting poverty?
> When banished by our miseries abroad
> (As suddenly we shall be) to seek out
> In some far climate where our names are strangers
> For charitable succour; wilt thou then,
> When in a bed of straw we shrink together,
> And the bleak winds shall whistle round our heads;
> Wilt thou then talk thus to me? Wilt thou then
> Hush my cares thus, and shelter me with love?
>
> BELVIDERA. Oh, I will love thee, even in madness love thee
> Tho' my distracted senses should forsake me,
> I'd find some intervals, when my poor heart
> Should 'swage itself, and be let loose to thine.
> Tho' the bare earth shall be our resting place,
> Its roots our food, some clift our habitation,
> I'll make this arm a pillow for thy head.
> And as thou sighing liest, and swelled with sorrow,
> Creep to thy bosom, pour the balm of love
> Into thy soul, and kiss thee to thy rest;
> Then praise our God, and watch thee till the morning.[2]

Small wonder is it that verses like these, in the mouths of beautiful and refined actresses, should have prolonged the stage life of *Venice Preserved* nearly up to the date of the *First Reform Bill.* Scott says: "The talents of Otway, in his scenes of passionate affection, rival at least, and sometimes excel, those of Shakespeare. More tears have been shed, probably, for the sorrows of Belvidera and Monimia than for those of Juliet and Desdemona." He ought, however, to have added that Belvidera's and Monimia's are essentially "stage" sorrows. There is much essential truth in Dryden's criticism. Otway does not, like Shakespeare, conceive his dramas organically, so

[1] *The Orphan*, Act ii. Sc. 1.
[2] *Venice Preserved*, Act i. Sc. 1.

as to give an ideal representation of real life and nature: he concentrates all his powers on the pathos of particular scenes and characters. In *The Orphan*, for example, the subject-matter is too slight for treatment on the heroic scale: it might easily have been comprised within two long or three short acts. The tragic interest of the play is centred exclusively in the misfortunes of the innocent Monimia: no sympathy can possibly be bestowed on those of the cowardly and dissimulating Castalio, or of the selfish, cruel, and treacherous Polydore. Again, the conspiracy represented in *Venice Preserved* is historical, but no conspirators off the stage ever acted from such motives, or proceeded in such a manner, as Otway imagines. Pierre resolves to overthrow the whole structure of society to revenge himself for the loss of a mistress. Jaffier, at Pierre's instigation, joins him in order to save his beloved Belvidera from want and poverty. The conspirators enrol Jaffier, a complete stranger, in their number upon the mere recommendation of Pierre, and Jaffier, as a pledge of sincerity, hands over Belvidera to the keeping of the treacherous Renaud, of whom he knows absolutely nothing. Belvidera imitates the Portia of Shakespeare in claiming the confidence of her husband. Immediately she has obtained it, she insists that he shall betray the plot to the Senate; and Jaffier is so poor a creature that, after the slightest possible expostulation, he yields to her entreaties. In fact, except for the pathetic scenes between Jaffier and Belvidera, on the one side, and Pierre and Jaffier, on the other, the entire action of *Venice Preserved* is as improbable as a nightmare; the stage situations caused by the conflicts between love and conscience, love and friendship, public and private duties, are admirable; but of the nature of man in society, as it is represented to us in *Julius Cæsar*, all trace has disappeared.

(iii.) The flashes of genius in Lee, and the more steady flame of Otway's art, were not really significant of revived life in the romantic drama. Dryden indeed produced two more tragedies in blank verse which deserve attention, as illustrating at once the lines on which the heroic style was

bound to advance and the cause of its rapid exhaustion—one, *The Duke of Guise*, composed with the assistance of Lee; the other, *Don Sebastian*, written after the Revolution of 1688. *The Duke of Guise* exhibits the tendency of the political element in the heroic drama to harden into party satire. The heroic play naturally took its colour from the politics of the moment. During the monarchical reaction in the years that immediately followed the Restoration, it sufficed to exalt the principle of absolutism in a view of general reflection and allegory. Dryden created the ideal character of Almanzor; Crowne, in his *Destruction of Jerusalem*, glanced obliquely at the Puritan zealots in the persons of his imaginary Pharisees. But when the effects of the reaction died out, and the Country Party began to raise its head against the Court, the opposition of the factions naturally expressed itself in particular and even personal satire. The age called for pamphlets, poems, and plays to embody the actual political situation, or at least to give utterance to the prevailing political passion. Settle gratified a Protestant audience by representing on the stage the crimes and punishment of Pope Joan. Shadwell, groaning under his necessity, exclaimed in his prologue to *The Lancashire Witches*:—

> False wit is now the most pernicious weed,
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> [illegible]
> Which daily from the teeming press y^e have found.
> But true wit seems in magic fetters bound,
> Like sprites which conjurors' circles do surround:

yet in the play itself he satirised the Toryism of the clergy in the character of Smirke.

On the opposite side, Dryden and Lee, under pretence of representing on the stage the history of France in the reign of Henry III., attacked the City Whigs, Shaftesbury, Monmouth, and the chief promoters of the Exclusion Bill. They avowed their motive in the prologue of the play:—

> Our play's a parallel: the Holy League
> Begot our Covenant: Guisards got the Whig:

> Whate'er our hot-brained sheriffs did advance
> Was, like our fashions, first produced in France;
> And, when worn out, well scourged, and banished there,
> Sent over, like their godly beggars, here.

And indeed the parallel was in many respects close enough. Almost all the incidents and characters recorded by Davila, from whose history the dramatists borrowed their action, had their analogies in the political situation in England. Guise's intrigues with the *echevins* of Paris were reproduced in the dealings of Monmouth and Shaftesbury with the sheriffs of the city of London: the flight of the French king to Blois resembled the summoning of the English Parliament at Oxford: the petition of the sixteen Whig peers against that removal recalled the Council of Sixteen who managed the affairs of the French league: Monmouth might pass for the Duke of Guise; Grillon (the historic Crillon) reappeared with the sentiments of a stout old Tory cavalier; and the perplexities of Henry III. were not altogether unlike the constitutional difficulties of Charles II. In making these applications Dryden shows all the skill and felicity which he displays in *Absalom and Achitophel.*

But while *Absalom and Achitophel* is an admirable work of art, the heroic play as an instrument of political satire proved a failure. The poet was obliged to think of other matters besides politics. He had to please the ladies, and to introduce the indispensable element of heroic love. Love, however, had nothing whatever to do with the real history of the Duke of Guise, so that here the parallel broke down. The dramatist, indeed, showed considerable invention in devising the machinery which the stage business required. Lee, to whom this part of the play was entrusted, imagined a virtuous heroine, Marmoutiere, niece of Grillon, who should be at once a kind of Egeria to the king, and at the same time in love with Guise; and the feelings of the female portion of the audience were sufficiently harrowed in the closing act by the scene in which the lovers bid each other an eternal farewell. But the intrusion of love, as a motive of action,

into a situation entirely political, only serves to bring into relief the staginess of the imaginative and emotional part of the tragedy, and to render unintelligible the conduct of Guise and the king, in the part which is founded on history.

Dryden also endeavoured, but without more success, to raise the play to a heroic level by the introduction of magic. He represents a magician named Malicorne who, like Faustus, has sold himself to the Devil, and who influences the action by the agency of Melanax, an evil spirit resembling Mephistopheles. It is, I think, very evident that Dryden had read Marlowe's *Faustus;* but if any reader wishes to study the difference between lyrical inspiration and mechanical stage-craft, he cannot do better than compare the conversations between Malicorne and Melanax in *The Duke of Guise*—and especially the final scene in which the magician awaits the coming of the appointed hour — with the parallel passages in the Elizabethan poet.[1]

One tragedy of Dryden's remains to be noticed, which stands apart both from his rhyming heroic plays and his blank verse imitations of Shakespeare, and which unites some of the characteristics of either class.

Don Sebastian was acted and published in 1690. The plot of the play turns on the fortunes of a King of Portugal, said to have perished in the battle of Alcazar, but whose return to his kingdom was long hoped for by the Portuguese, in the belief that he was still alive. About a hundred years before Dryden, Peele had taken the historical part of the story as the foundation for a play. Dryden, as he says himself, "takes up the story where the history has laid it down." He imagines Sebastian, after being left for dead on the field, to have been revived and brought prisoner before Muley Moluch, Emperor of Morocco, who grants him his life, but delivers him to the charge of Dorax, his deadly enemy, who desires his death. The action of the play turns partly on the rela

[1] Mr. Saintsbury, in his revision of Scott's edition of Dryden (vol. vii. p 10), states as his opinion that Dryden was unacquainted with *Faustus* I think, however, that the whole of Act v. Sc. 2 is a jumbled recollection of this play and *The Tempest.*

tions between Sebastian and Dorax, partly on the love of Sebastian for the heroine, Almeyda, who is also loved by the tyrant Muley Moluch. Sebastian and Almeyda are secretly married; the emperor, endeavouring to violate Almeyda's chastity, is murdered by the mob; but when events seem to have turned out fortunately for the King of Portugal and his bride, it is discovered that they are brother and sister. They resolve to retire from the world into separate convents, and the legend of the king's disappearance while alive is thus accredited on the principle of stage probability.

Don Sebastian has been praised as a drama, highly by Johnson,[1] hyperbolically by Scott, who considers it the finest play in our literature after Shakespeare's.[2] There can be no doubt that it contains many passages of sentiment and reflection, written in that manner, at once grand and familiar, of which Dryden was so great a master. But, viewed structurally, it has all the faults of violence and improbability that disfigure Dryden's rhyming heroic plays. It is very interesting to observe that Dryden was half conscious of the weaknesses of his own dramatic method, and endeavoured to disguise them by reasoning. In his preface to *Don Sebastian* he justifies the structure of the plays as follows:—

> This groundwork the history afforded me, and I desire no better to build a play upon; for where the event of a great action is left doubtful, there the poet is left master. He may raise what he pleases on that foundation, provided he makes it of a piece, and according to the rule of probability. From hence I was only obliged, that Sebastian should return to Portugal no more; but at the same time I had him at my own disposal, whether to bestow him in Afric, or in any other corner of the world, or to have closed the tragedy with his death, and the last of these was certainly the most easy, but for the same reason the least artful; because, as I have somewhere said, the poison and the dagger are still at hand to butcher a hero when a poet wants the brains to save him.

Death being set aside, how is Sebastian's disappear-

[1] *Lives of the Poets*, "Dryden."
[2] Edition of *Dryden's Works* (1821), vol. vii. p. 277.

ance from the world to be explained. "The knowledge of his incest, though innocently committed," says Dryden, "was the best reason which the stage could give for hindering his return." Perhaps so, but considering that the reason is admitted to be purely imaginary, a more probable combination of circumstances ought to be invented to give it credit. Yet surely no more improbable story was ever heard than the labyrinth of fatalities in which Sebastian and Almeyda are involved! We are to imagine that though the former was King of Portugal, and the latter Queen of Barbary, Almeyda, the supposed daughter of "exiled parents," who "were refuged in the Court" of Philip II at the same time as Juan, father of Sebastian, is in reality the daughter of Juan and the exiled Zayda. How she came to ascend the throne of Barbary, and how Sebastian, while fighting against Muley Moluch, had time to fall in love with her, we are left to imagine; but at any rate their mutual inclination is evident to Sebastian's faithful attendant, Alvarez, who, knowing all about the love affair of Juan and Zayda and its consequences, nevertheless wickedly and foolishly delays to say anything to Sebastian till after his marriage with Almeyda!

Dryden evidently felt that all this was violent in the extreme. "It is true," he says, "I have no right to blast his (Sebastian's) reputation with such a crime; but declaring it to be fiction, I desire my audience to think it no longer true, than while they are seeing it represented, for that once ended, he may be a saint for aught I know, and we have reason to presume that he is."[1] So that, according to Dryden, the purpose of playing is not "to hold the mirror up to nature," but to produce a momentary stage effect. This false mode of dramatic conception vitiates the whole life of the play both as regards the situations and the characters. Dryden, indeed, thought otherwise.

"This is not a play (says he in his Preface) that was huddled

[1] [illegible]

up in haste; and to show that it was not, I will own that, besides the general moral of it, which is given in the four last lines,[1] there is also another moral, couched under every one of the principal parts and characters, which a judicious critic will observe though I point not to it in the preface.

Let us test this in the highly-praised character of Dorax. Dorax is in reality a mere variation of Almanzor in *The Siege of Granada;* and the famous scene in the fourth act between him and Sebastian is only intelligible in the light of the stage conventions of the heroic drama. He was once a Christian and a favourite of Sebastian, when King of Portugal; he has renounced his religion; he has thrown off his allegiance; he thirsts for revenge against his sovereign. Why? Because he is jealous of Henriquez, who has surpassed him in Sebastian's favour, and on whom the king has bestowed the hand of Dorax's mistress, Violante. Egotistic passion, Dryden argues, is quite capable of producing such effects. Possibly; but a poet has no right to represent a character, capable of such pettiness, in heroic proportions.

The diction of the play exhibits in blank verse all the old characteristics of the heroic rhyming drama; and, oddly enough, the greatest rants are put into the mouth of Almeyda. Here are some examples:—

> O that I had the fruitful heads of Hydra,
> That one might bourgeon where another fell!
> Still would I give thee work; still, still, thou tyrant,
> And hiss thee with the last.
>
> . . . .
>
> Expect revenge from heaven, unhuman wretch,
> Nor hope to ascend Sebastian's holy bed;
> Flames, daggers, poisons, guard the holy steps:
> Those are the promised pleasures of my love.
>
> . . . . . .

---

[1] In these, as in many other passages of the play, Dryden has imitated Massinger, who is fond of concluding his plays with a moral:—

> And let Sebastian and Almeyda's fate
> The dreadful sentence to the world relate,
> That unrepented crimes of parents dead
> Are justly punished on their children's head.

Compare pp. 351, 352.

> The skies are hushed, no grumbling thunders roll.
> Now take your swing, ye impious; sin unpunished;
> Eternal Providence seems overmatched,
> And with a slumbering nod assents to murder.

(iv.) As romance in the English poetic tragedy expired in heroic extravagance, so in comedy it dwindled into prose and the imitation of artificial manners. Of English poetic comedy there are only two kinds that have their roots deep in English character and institutions—the romantic comedy of Shakespeare, and the satiric comedy of Ben Jonson; the one springing out of the ancient *fabliaux*, the other out of the mediæval moralities. In course of time a third species was formed by Beaumont and Fletcher, which combined some of the qualities of Shakespeare's style with others peculiar to Ben Jonson, but which was exotic in character, being in many essential respects an imitation of the practice of the Spanish stage. The contrasted spirit of these different orders of comedy is faithfully reflected in their respective styles. Shakespeare's romantic comedy, moving in a poetic and ideal atmosphere, is mainly written in verse: Jonson's dialogue, as reflecting manners more directly, has about an equal proportion of verse and prose; while, though Fletcher's comedy of intrigue is, more often than not, versified, the language approaches nearer to the level of ordinary conversation, than is the case in Shakespeare's plays.

Dryden reflected critically on the qualities of these opposite styles. He had himself little turn for comedy, and admitted the fact: "That I admire not any comedy equally with tragedy is, perhaps, from the sullenness of my humour; but that I detest those farces, which are now the frequent entertainments of the stage, I am sure I have reason on my side."[1] Whatever, therefore, he provided for the mirth of an audience had the air of being reasoned out on critical principles. For the romantic comedies of Shakespeare, whose tragic genius he so highly revered, he had little feeling; but he admired the structure of his tragi-comedies, and appreciated the "wit"

[1] Preface to *Mock Astrologer*

of Beaumont and Fletcher, because it had the same aim as he always proposed to himself. "As for repartee in particular," he says, "as it is the very soul of conversation, so it is the greatest grace of comedy, when it is proper to the characters."[1] He considered, however, the style of Beaumont and Fletcher to be incorrect. Ben Jonson was the comic dramatist of the preceding age whom his judgment most approved. He had a real reverence for the solidity with which Jonson laid the foundations of his comedy in the vices and follies of the time, and he sympathised, at least in theory, with the comparatively regular construction of his plays. But he failed to understand, what is so essential a feature in Jonson, the spirit of the old morality, and he took him for his guide only in so far as he was an exact imitator of manners. His own leading principle in comedy was one against which Jonson would certainly have protested: "This being then established, that the first end of comedy is delight, and instruction only the second; it may reasonably be inferred that comedy is not so much obliged to the punishment of the faults it represents, as tragedy."[2]

Composed in this eclectic spirit, Dryden's comedies, from the first, exhibit in their structure the operation of conflicting principles. *The Wild Gallant*, produced in 1662, is evidence of the surviving power of the old Spanish influence: one of the speakers in the prologue shows what the audience expected from the poet:—

> Whence I conclude it is your author's lot
> To be endangered with a Spanish plot.

Scott interprets this to mean that the plot of *The Wild Gallant* was borrowed from the Spanish;[3] but it is evident that the words really contain a question, which is answered by the next speaker in the dialogue, who says:—

> This play is English, and the growth your own;
> As such it yields to English plays alone.

[1] Preface to *Mock Astrologer.*
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Edition of *Dryden's Works* (1821), vol. ii. p. 15.

But though the plot is therefore probably original, though the names of the persons are English, and the scene laid in England, the extravagance of the incidents and the complication of the intrigue in *The Wild Gallant* reveal a Spanish taste. One or two of the characters, however, are plainly the fruits of the study of Ben Jonson—Nonsuch, for example, a humorous old lord who imagines himself liable to perform some of the duties which Nature has imposed on the female sex; and Trice, a Justice of the Peace, so devoted to gambling that he plays cards with himself and quarrels with imaginary opponents. The language of the play, on the principle that Dryden always kept steadily in view, is prose, and is closely imitated from the conversational usage of the time.

Sir Martin Mar-All and *The Mock Astrologer*, the former produced in 1667, the latter in 1668, are little more than adaptations of French originals, *L'Étourdi* of Molière and *Le Feint Astrologue* of Thomas Corneille, with the plot of which Dryden has also combined scenes taken from Molière's *Dépit Amoureux* *Sir Martin Mar-All* is, as far as may be, accommodated to the requirements of English manners; but *Marriage à la Mode*, which appeared in 1673, retains a certain colour of romantic idealism. The scene is laid in Sicily; the names of the actors, like those of the older English stage, are classical; and the main action is serious. All the merit of the play, however, lies in the person of Melantha, in which the language and affectations of the Court are imitated with a vivacity that even to-day causes the character to live and breathe in the imagination. How artificial these characteristics were, and how much the success of the impersonation depended on an actress who understood the genius of the age, may be imagined from the admirable description given by Colley Cibber in his *Apology* of Mrs. Montford's representation of Melantha:—

The first ridiculous airs that break from her are upon a gallant never seen before, who delivers her a letter from his father recommending him to her good graces as an honourable lover. Here one would think she might naturally show a little

of the sex's decent reserve, though never so slightly covered. No, sir, not a tittle of it: Modesty is a poor-souled country gentlewoman: she is too much a Court lady to be under so vulgar confusions. She reads the letter through with a careless dropping lip and an erected brow, humming it hastily over as if she were impatient to outgo her father's commands, by making a complete conquest of him at once; and that the letter might not embarrass the attack, crack! she crumbles it at once into her palm, and pours down upon him the whole battery of airs, eyes, and motion; down goes her dainty, diving body to the ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious load of her attractions; then launches into a flood of fine language and compliment, still playing her chest forward in fifty falls and risings, like a swan upon waving water; and to complete her impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own wit that she will not give her lover leave to praise it. Silent assenting bows, and vain endeavours to speak, are all the share of the conversation he is admitted to, which, at last, he is removed from by her engagement to half a score of visits, which she swims from him to make, with a promise to return in a twinkling.[1]

Melantha may be taken as a type of an influential part of the audience in the Caroline theatre: it may therefore be supposed that no dramatist would have felt himself hampered in the free imitation of contemporary manners by considerations of what was due to female modesty. Dryden, who had all the self-esteem of a great genius, loved to revenge himself for the indignities inflicted on him in the practice of his profession, by cynically proclaiming his contempt for the vulgarity of the public taste:—

> Now our machinery lumber will not sell,
> And you no longer care for Heaven or Hell;
> What stuff will please you next the Lord can tell.

Of *Limberham* (produced in 1678), in the prologue to which play these lines occur, I need only say that the "stuff," in respect of action, character, sentiment, and language, was suitable to the taste of the audience.

A higher level is reached in *The Spanish Friar.* The main plot of this play is tragic, and the happy *dénouement* is found only in the closing scene; but the

[1] Apology for the *Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (1740), pp. 138-9.

situation is relieved with a comic underplot, the leading character in which gives its title to the drama. Scott, always generously eager to exalt the merits of his author, bestows perhaps exaggerated praise on the conception of Dominic.[1] He compares him with Falstaff, very injuriously to the fat knight of Shakespeare, for whom I suppose every reader cherishes an affection. Liar, perjurer, hypocrite, lecher, and pimp, Dominic moves, and was intended to move, nothing but disgust. Dryden hated the clergy of all denominations; and *The Spanish Friar*, produced in 1682, when the excitement over the Exclusion Bill was at its height, indulged his own aversion, while it gratified the Protestant fury of the mob. The character of the Friar has nothing in it of the humanity of Falstaff; his absurdity consists simply in the solemn air with which he condemns deadly sins in the abstract, and finds sanctimonious reasons for their commission as soon as his own interest is evidently concerned. All that I am inclined to grant to the underplot in *The Spanish Friar* is, that it is far more genuinely comic than the underplot of *Don Sebastian*, in which Dryden gratuitously indulges his spleen against the clergy in the ridiculous person of a Mufti, who is mixed up in a number of disgusting adventures coldly invented by the poet.

Amphitryon, Dryden's latest comedy, produced in 1690, is an adaptation of Plautus' old play, which had been rehandled by Molière for the French stage. I cannot think that either the French or English rendering of the subject is worthy of comparison with the original. All the striking situations developed by his modern imitators were invented by Plautus, and he treats them with a freshness, a vigour, and a dignity which go far to lift the fable out of a gross atmosphere. Molière avoids indecency, but, in suiting the dialogue to the requirements of French gallantry, he has deprived his play of much of the native humour and character which give a charm to the Latin. Dryden's fancy was caught

[1] Scott's edition of *Dryden's Works*, vol. vi. p. 368.

with the romantic complications arising out of the intrigue, and in the serious episodes, the only ones really congenial to him, he showed himself capable of rising to the proper level of his subject; unfortunately, he had to please audiences which looked for the comic representation of indecent scenes; and here, as usual, from disdain or violence, he went beyond what that audience, with all its coarseness, desired. The result may be seen in the character of Phædra.

The comic style of Dryden forms the link between the practice of the old poetical comedy, represented by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher, and the comedy of prose, represented by Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. On the one hand, so far as he could please himself, he retained something of the spirit of Shakespeare's and Fletcher's romance: he aimed at the mixture of tragedy and comedy in the imitation of life, and sought to idealise action by laying his scenes in foreign parts and giving his *dramatis personæ* classical or foreign names. On the other hand, in his representation of modern manners, he strove to exhibit images and ideas familiar to his audience, and he invariably wrote in prose. Wycherley and his followers proceeded one step farther: they divested comedy of her last poor rags of idealism, and restricted themselves rigidly to copying the naked manners of domestic life.

As prose dramatists, they fall beyond the scope of this history; but something must be said of their general characteristics, both because it is only in this way that I can complete my survey of the movement of the romantic drama as a whole, and also because, unless their works are viewed in relation to their predecessors, the real causes of their failure to retain a hold on the national imagination are liable to be misunderstood. It is often supposed that the comic dramatists of the Restoration have been banished from the stage by an impulse of morality, running counter to the true interests of art. Voices of protest are heard from time to time against the crusade of Jeremy Collier, who headed the reaction that is believed to have killed them; and the arguments of

the two most famous critics who have pleaded in their behalf, however mutually contradictory, sum up admirably all that can be said in their favour.

Translated into real life (says Charles Lamb), the characters of his (Congreve's) and his friend Wycherley's dramas are profligates and strumpets—the business of their brief existence, the undivided pursuit of *lawless gallantry. No other spring of action* or possible motive of conduct is recognised; principles which, universally acted upon, must reduce the frame of things to chaos. But we do them wrong in so translating them. No such effects are produced in *their* world. When we are among them, we are among a chaotic people. We are not to judge them by our usages. No reverend institutions are insulted by their proceedings—for they have none among them. No purity of the marriage bed is stained—for none is supposed to have a being. No deep affections are disquieted, no holy wedlock bands are snapped asunder—for affection's depth and wedded faith are not of the growth of that soil. There is neither right nor wrong—gratitude or its opposite—claim or duty—paternity or worship. . . . The whole is a passing pageant, where we should sit as unconcerned at the issues, for life or death, as at the battle of the frogs and mice. But, like Don Quixote, we take part against the puppets, and quite as impertinently. We dare not contemplate an Atlantis, a scheme out of which our coxcombic moral sense is for a little transitory ease excluded. We have not the courage to imagine a state of things for which there is neither reward nor punishment. We cling to the painful necessities of shame and blame. We would indict our very dreams."[1]

This is the judgment of an intellectual epicure, not of a responsible critic. The stage, in Lamb's view, is a fairyland of romance; and what is presented on it is not to be regarded as reality, but as a kind of magic illusion enabling us for a moment to set ourselves free from the evils of life. He does not seem to see that no dramatist worthy of the name would consent to save his art on such a plea. "The purpose of playing was, and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature"; Vanbrugh and Congreve would have repudiated the apology of Lamb, and would have relied on the exactly opposite defence set up for them by Hazlitt:—

[1] Charles Lamb, "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century."

He (Collier) forgets in his overheated zeal two things: first, that the stage must be copied from real life, that the manners represented there must exist elsewhere, and "denote a foregone conclusion," to satisfy common sense; secondly, that the stage cannot shock common decency, according to the notions that prevail of it in any age or country, because the exhibition is public. If the pulpit, for instance, had banished all vice and imperfection from the world, as our critic would suppose, we should not have seen the offensive reflection of them on the stage, which he resents as an affront to the cloth, and an outrage on religion. On the contrary, with such a sweeping reformation as this theory implies, the office of the preacher, as well as of the player, would be gone; and if common peccadilloes of lying, swearing, intriguing, fighting, drinking, gaming, and other such obnoxious dramatic commonplaces, were once fairly got rid of in reality, neither the comic poet would be able to laugh at them on the stage, nor our good-natured author to consign them to damnation elsewhere.[1]

Hazlitt here shows a complete misunderstanding of the charge brought by Collier against the comic dramatists of the Restoration. No doubt Collier's attack was indiscriminate and blundering: he often pushes his arguments to lengths which would altogether condemn the stage as an institution. But he does not intend to condemn it altogether: he praises many of the Greek and Roman dramatists: he admires the older English school: all his reasoning is directed against the immorality and profaneness of the contemporary stage. He argued that Dryden, Congreve, and Vanbrugh had violated the rule laid down for them by Shakespeare, "to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." Dramatic imitation, in his view, was justifiable, provided that it was moral. There was no reason why, within the limits prescribed by taste and propriety, the dramatist should not represent on the stage "fighting, drinking, and gaming": all that was required of him was that, if he did so, these actions should be placed in a true light. Collier's charge against the comic poets of his time was that they did not really *laugh at* vice and folly, but simply copied them photographically;

[1] Hazlitt, *English Poets and Comic Writers* (1870), p. 119.

or rather imitated them in so false a light as to suggest Lamb's plea, that the things represented were innocent because they existed only in the life of Cloud-Cuckoo Town. Such a mode of imitation was a sin, not simply against the laws of morality, but against the laws of art.

It is not to be denied that the accusation was substantially just; their own defective art, rather than the squeamish Pharisaism of their critics, has displaced the Caroline dramatists from the rank they once held in the public estimation. If their profaneness and immorality lay only on the surface of their work, allowance might be made for it in the standard of manners: unhappily it enters into the life of their conceptions. In whatever aspect the question be viewed, this conclusion is irresistible. Regarded as a mirror of taste, the Caroline comedy bears witness to a decaying condition of society, in which all the great springs of public action—honour, religion, patriotism—have run nearly dry. Regarded as the production of art, the plays of Wycherley, Congreve, and Vanbrugh stand at the end of a great period of dramatic development, beyond which there is no scope for original invention: their work exhibits all the signs of exhaustion common to such periods, and particularly in the eagerness with which they apply the dramatic principles of an earlier and greater age to a range of subjects in which these principles can no longer operate with advantage.

Their style is evidently formed from a combination of the styles of Jonson and Fletcher: like Jonson, they aim, in all external matters, such as dress, gesture, and language, at the closest imitation of life; but they adhere to Fletcher's Spanish tradition in the treatment of plot and action. Hence the texture of their plays is composed of an incongruous association of romance and realism: the plot, which Aristotle calls the soul of the play, is extravagant in its romantic improbability: on the other hand, the manners, the sentiments, the language of the actors are such as might have been seen or heard in any drawing-room or chocolate-house in the seventeenth century.

To arrive at this result they ransack the plays of the

Elizabethan and Jacobean poets and of their French contemporaries for stage situations analogous to their own domestic plots. Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, for example, is constructed out of the blended motives of *Twelfth Night* and *Le Misanthrope:* the episode of Sparkish and Alithea in *The Country Wife* is transplanted from Fletcher's *Coxcomb:* Congreve, in his *Old Bachelor*, reduces the character of Benedick to the baldest prose, in the person of Heartwell, in order to present a misogamist in a ridiculous light; he borrows from Fletcher a large portion of the main plot of *The Elder Brother*, and blends it, in *Love for Love*, with some of the motives of the same poet's *Scornful Lady.* Vanbrugh, wishing, in *The Relapse*, to represent female virtue rising to an unaccustomed altitude, has recourse to Fletcher's *Knight of Malta*, from which he abstracts the scene between Oriana and Miranda; Farquhar calmly appropriates the whole plot of *The Wild Goose Chase*, and reproduces it in prose under the title of *The Inconstant.*

Applying this principle of romantic action to what Charles Lamb calls "the business of their brief existence, the undivided pursuit of lawless gallantry," the Caroline dramatists cared not how improbable they made their plots, so long as they were suited to their immediate stage purpose. Their invention is of the shallowest. Congreve, who goes far beyond any of them in the complication of his plots, almost invariably falls back on a mock marriage to bring about the *dénouement.* These marriages are managed in a manner which would have been impossible off the stage. In *The Old Bachelor*, Heartwell is married to a woman of blemished reputation by a mock marriage, from which he is relieved by a real marriage between Sylvia, his supposed wife, accompanied by Lucy, her maid, and two gulls of the town, who take them, disguised as they are in masks, for two more or less respectable fine ladies. Angelina in *Love for Love* (a character suggested by the Angelina of Fletcher's *Elder Brother*) pretends to marry the father of Valentine, her lover, in order to test the devotion of the latter, which he displays by consenting

to sign away his right of succession to the paternal estate. In *The Way of the World*, Mirabell, the hero, has professed love to an old lady in order the better to pay his addresses to her niece. If the niece marries without her aunt's consent, half her fortune goes to the daughter of the old lady. Mirabell, to free himself from his entanglement, marries Waitwell, his valet, to the waiting-woman of old Lady Wishfort, and contrives in this way to inveigle the latter into a contract of marriage with Waitwell, who personates a knight for the occasion. Discovering, when too late, that her supposed husband is only a valet, Lady Wishfort is in despair, and promises to consent to Mirabell's marriage with Millamant on condition that he releases her from her difficulties. This, of course, he is able to do by showing that her contract of marriage is a sham. The idea is borrowed from Ben Jonson's *Silent Woman;* but the whole intrigue in *The Way of the World* is ten times more complicated and improbable than in the older play. Only one degree less absurd is the plot of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, in which Lord Foppington, a foolish coxcomb, being contracted to a woman who has never seen him, is anticipated by his brother, who, with the connivance of a chaplain, takes his place, and is actually married to the heiress.

The characters that play their parts in this fantastic stage world are evidently constructed on Fletcher's principle; that is to say, they are not individuals but types, consisting for the most part of Court rakes and fine ladies with their confidential servants. To these are added a certain number of *dramatis personæ* modelled on Ben Jonson's Humours—rustic coquettes, immoral chaplains, sailors talking on shore a nautical dialect, and country gentlemen who in town are usually drunk. These are studied from a distance, but the fashionable characters reflect accurately the most intimate ideas and sentiments of society. The men are the Rutilios, the Mirabells, the Don Johns, the women the Bachas, the Lillia-Biancas, and the Celias, of Fletcher; but divested of their ideal surroundings and schooled in the conventions of a later

Court. From that Court it is evident that the last traditions of chivalry, which lingered round the throne of James I., have disappeared. The idea of honour, for example, is exhibited in Fletcher as something existing only in public opinion, but yet as a standard to which gentlemen are expected to conform. Not one of the Caroline dramatists understands what the word means. The following speech of Mirabell, the *hero* of Congreve's *Way of the World*, may be taken as declaring the code of a "gentleman" in Charles II.'s Court:—

MRS. FAINALL. You have been the cause that I loved without bounds, and would you set limits to that aversion of which you have been the occasion? Why did you make me marry this man?

MIRABELL. Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? To save that idol, reputation. If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name but on a husband? I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an interested and professing friend, a false and designing lover; yet one whose wit and outward fair behaviour had gained a reputation with the town enough to make that woman stand excused who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion, a worse had not answered the purpose. When you are weary of him you know your remedy.

So too with chastity. Fletcher could at least conceive, and in his Lucina represent, a woman valuing her honour above her life. What Vanbrugh and his contemporaries thought on the subject may be inferred from the sentiments of the moderately respectable Lady Brute in *The Provoked Wife*:—

LADY BRUTE. They (men) most of them think there is no such thing as virtue, considered in the strictest notions of it; and therefore when you hear 'em say, such a one is a woman of reputation, they only mean she's a woman of discretion. For they consider we have no more religion than they have, nor so much morality; and between you and I, Belinda, I'm afraid the want of inclination seldom protects any of us.

BELINDA. But what do you think of the fear of being found out?

LADY BRUTE. I think that never kept any woman virtuous long. We are not such cowards neither. No: let us once pass fifteen, and we have too good an opinion of our own cunning to believe the world can penetrate what we would keep a secret. And so in short we cannot blame the men for judging us by *themselves*.[1]

What is really characteristic and original in the prose drama of the Restoration is the dialogue. This, as Dryden shows us, had come to be accounted "the greatest grace of comedy," and accordingly the dramatists bent all their efforts to the invention of "repartee." Wit was so much their aim, that they forgot Dryden's saving clause that it must be "proper to the characters." "Tell me," asks Pope, "if Congreve's fools are fools indeed."[2] Undoubtedly they are not. *Brisk*, *Witwood*, and *Tattle*, who are meant to be contemptible characters, are as lively and amusing, and say as many good things, as *Mirabell* and *Mellefont*; while, in the same way, Vanbrugh's Lord Foppington, intended for the model of empty-headed coxcombry, quite outsparkles in conversation his brother Tom Fashion, though the latter in action is clever enough to cheat him out of a rich wife. Taken in itself, the dialogue of the whole school is so vivid and brilliant, that, if we overlook the artifice and excuse the absence of truth and nature, the excellence of the writing leaves nothing to be desired. It is founded on a careful study of the principle of Euphuism. There is the same logical precision, the same attention to metaphor and antithesis, the same balance of words and clauses, as in Lyly; but it is evident that the manner of Donne and Cowley has intervened; and whereas Lyly's ambition is confined to the pointed arrangement of words, Congreve, the chief exponent of Caroline "wit," aims primarily at manufacturing paradoxes of idea, such as are expressed in the following typical sentence:—

ANGELINA. She that marries a fool, Sir Sampson, forfeits the reputation of her honesty or understanding; and she that marries a very witty man is a slave to the severity and insolent conduct

[1] *The Provoked Wife*, Act v. Sc. 2.

[2] *Epistle to Augustus*, 283.

of her husband. I should like a man of wit for a lover, because I would have such a one in my power; but I would no more be his wife than his enemy. For his malice is not a more terrible consequence of his hate than his jealousy is of his love.[1]

The effect of a prolonged exchange of repartee in this Euphuistic vein may be judged by the following passage:—

MILLAMANT. Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's clothes.

MARWOOD. If we had that liberty, we should be as weary of one set of acquaintance, though never so good, as we are of one suit, though never so fine. A fool and a dolly staff would now and then find days of grace, and be worn for variety.

MILLAMANT. I would consent to wear 'em if they would wear alike; but fools never wear out—they are such *drap de Berri* things; without one could give 'em to one's chambermaid after a day or two.

MARWOOD. 'Twere better so indeed. Or what think you of the playhouse? A fine gay glossy fool should be given there like a new masking habit, after the masquerade is over, and we have done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise, and never admitted by a woman of wit, but to blind her affair with a lover of sense. If you would not appear barefaced now and own Mirabell, you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwood as your hood and scarf. And indeed 'tis time, for the town found it; the scent is grown too big for the pretence. . . . Indeed, Millamant, you can no more conceal it than my Lady Strammel can her face; that goodly face which, in defiance of her Rhenish wine tea, will not be comprehended by a mask.

MILLAMANT. I'll take my death, Marwood, you are more censorious than a decayed beauty or a discarded toast. Mincing, tell the men they may come up. My aunt is not dressing here; their folly is less provoking than your malice.[2]

Here I may fitly bring the history of the English romantic drama to a close. For it is evident that when dialogue of this kind could be listened to with approval on the stage, the idea of romance in action had died out of the imagination of English society. Romance in its epic form was the natural reflection of the chivalrous

[1] *Love for Love*, Act v. Sc. 2. [2] *The Way of the World*, Act iii. Sc. 10.

spirit, and, as such, it had readily been converted into a dramatic shape, agreeable to an imagination exalted by the defeat of foreign invaders and by a consciousness of rising national greatness. It had been the instrument of expression for the idea of patriotic energy in *King Henry V.*, of the mixed tragedy and comedy of life in *The Merchant of Venice*, of tragic action and passion in *Hamlet* and *Othello*. After the death of Elizabeth the life of the Court seemed to come into conflict with the life of the nation, and this antagonism reflected itself on the stage. The courtier ridiculed the conception of romance formed by the citizen; the dramatist, following the stronger current of taste, converted the romantic drama into a mirror of the manners of the Court.

To a certain extent this was natural, for the Court was the last home and asylum of chivalry. But in restricting himself to the imitation of courtly ideas, the poet confined his imagination to an always contracting sphere of action. The institution of chivalry rested on two principles of action—love and honour. Of these honour declined in proportion as the importance of the profession of arms diminished with the growth of civil society, and the courtier, finding no opportunity of translating his ideas into practice, became effeminate or cynical The progressive degeneration of knighthood reflects itself equally in fiction and the drama. Characters like Amphialus in Sidney's *Arcadia* or Shakespeare's Hotspur entertain ideas of honour almost unknown to Amintor in *The Maid's Tragedy;* but even Amintor's notions of the value of reputation reveal a conscience not utterly corrupted, like that of Mirabell in *The Way of the World.*

It is the same with the principle of love. Love in the poetry of the Middle Ages reveals itself in two aspects — it is either a platonised reflection of the old Teutonic reverence for women, or it is a school of knightly manners, where the castled aristocracy may cultivate a peculiar system of sentiment and language, distinguishing their order from the plebeian world around them. Dante's Beatrice and Spenser's Una are the

representatives of one class; Guillaume de Lorris' new version of the art of love, in *The Romance of the Rose*, is the type of the other. The former conception breathes its spirituality into the beautiful characters of Shakespeare's women, making the unselfishness of Viola, the patience of Imogen, and the purity of Isabella, at once ideal and credible. The latter inspires the elaborate code framed by the female canonists and casuists of the *Cours d'Amour*, which, embodied first of all in the treatise of André le Chapelain, *De Amore*, and adapted to the manners of a later time by Castiglione, in his *Cortegiano*, formed the basis of social etiquette in every Court of Europe, and was reflected with all the hectic colouring of decline in the comedy of Fletcher.

Thou art a bountiful and brave spring (said Ben Jonson in dedicating his *Cynthia's Revels* "to the special fountain of manners, the Court" of James I.), and waterest all the noble plants of this island. In thee the whole kingdom dresseth itself, and is ambitious to use thee as her glass. Beware then thou render men's figures truly, and teach them no less to hate their deformities, than to love their forms; for to grace there should come reverence; and no man can call that lovely which is not also venerable. It is not powdering, perfuming, and every day smelling of the tailor that converteth to a beautiful object; but a mind shining through any suit, which needs no false light either of riches or honours to help it."

How far the Court of Charles II. and his successor adopted this view of its duties may be inferred from the character of the conversation between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall cited above. In the far-off infancy of chivalry an old Latin rhyme had set forth the then familiar duties of the newly-initiated knight:—

Accingatur gladio super femur miles
Absit dissolutio, absint actus viles;
Corpus novi militis solet balneari,
Ut a factis vetitis discat emundari.[1]

Even as late as the beginning of the sixteenth century the grave pages of Castiglione show that perfection of

[1] Vol. i. p. 203.

manners could be acquired by the youthful courtier only from conversation with accomplished and virtuous women. Images of men and women educated on these principles stand out before us in the dramas of Shakespeare. But when men like Mirabell set the standard of honour; when a Millamant represented the "venerableness" of love; when the innermost thoughts of her sex were revealed by a Lady Brute,—it is evident that prose was the only vehicle of expression suitable to the stage. Chivalry, as an institution, was dead, and with it had expired the poetic drama.



APPENDIX

ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF SOME OF THE EARLY PLAYS ASSIGNED TO SHAKESPEARE, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS DRAMATIC GENIUS

As the growth and development of Shakespeare's dramatic genius can be properly estimated only by studying his plays in the order of their production, as far as this can be ascertained, it is all-important to form a right judgment as to the authorship of certain early dramas with which his name has been associated in very different senses by different critics. In forming a judgment on this matter I have observed the following principles :—

1. When the external and the internal evidence agree as to authorship, the proof of authenticity may be regarded as unimpeachable.

2 When there is an apparent conflict of evidence, strong external evidence should be preferred to evidence that is merely internal.

3 It is dangerous to rely either on external or on internal evidence apart from each other.

Should any one suppose that the enunciation of these canons of criticism is superfluous, a review of the various phases through which the question of authenticity has passed will soon convince him of his mistake.

The chief external canon of evidence for the authenticity of any of Shakespeare's writings is the folio edition of his works [illegible] seven years of his death. [illegible] Condell, both of them [illegible] of the dramatist, and among the legatees mentioned in his will, the former being also the manager of the Globe Theatre, in which Shakespeare for the last portion of his life was part proprietor. These editors had obviously excellent opportunities of knowing what plays had

really been the work of his hand. There is accordingly a strong presumption that whatever they include in this folio is genuine —a presumption which is made doubly strong in the case of such of its contents as are mentioned as Shakespeare's by Meres in his *Palladis Tamia*, published in 1598. In the third edition of the folio, issued in 1664 by Peter Chetwynde, were included, besides the contents of the first edition, *Pericles*, *The London Prodigal*, *The History of Thomas, Lord Cromwell*, *Sir John Oldcastle and Lord Cobham*, *The Puritan Widow*, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, *The Tragedy of Locrine.* With the exception of *Pericles*, of which I shall have something to say hereafter, the external and internal evidence on behalf of these was of the weakest. Nevertheless the early German critics, Tieck and Schlegel accepted it almost unhesitatingly as proof of authenticity. On the other hand, the English critics were inclined, almost from the first, to question the authorship of some of the plays ascribed to Shakespeare, even when guaranteed by such powerful testimony as that of Heminge and Condell. Pope, for some reason which he did not fully explain, thought the *Winter's Tale* (among other plays) unworthy of Shakespeare's genius. Warburton challenged the three parts of *King Henry VI.* In 1790 Malone rejected *Titus Andronicus* (in spite of the twofold evidence of Meres and the folio of 1623), *King Henry VI.* (at least in its groundwork), and *Pericles*, the last-named having been admitted among Shakespeare's plays by all Malone's predecessors from the time of Rowe. As the elaborate arguments by which Malone justified his decision in the case of *King Henry VI.* have formed the starting-point for the speculations of all succeeding English editors of Shakespeare, it will be well to examine them, especially since the conclusion at which we may arrive must determine our judgment as to the authorship, not only of *King Henry VI.*, but of several early plays of which Shakespeare admittedly made recasts.

Malone reasons as follows :—

My hypothesis is that the *First Part of King Henry VI.*, as it now appears (of which no quarto copy is extant), was the entire, or nearly the entire, production of some ancient dramatist; that *The Whole Contention of the Two Houses of Yorke and Lancaster*, written probably before the year 1590, was also the composition of some writer who preceded Shakspeare; and that from this piece, which is in two parts (the former of which is entitled *The First Part of the Famous Contention of the Two Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the Death of the good Duke Humphrey, etc.*, first printed in 1594; and the latter *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke, and the Death of good King Henry the Sixt*, which originally appeared in 1595, and both parts printed together in 1600), our poet formed the

two plays entitled *The Second and Third Parts of King Henrie VI* as they appear in the first folio edition of his works.

Adopting a principle of Upton's, that "authors have their peculiar style and manner, from which a true critic can form as unerring a judgment as a painter," Malone argued, in opposition to Johnson, that the diction, versification, and figures of *King Henry VI.* are not Shakespeare's. "With respect," he said, "to the diction and the allusions, which I shall consider under the same head, it is very observable that in the *First Part of King Henry VI.* there are more allusions to mythology, to classical authors, and to ancient and modern history, than I believe can be found in any one piece of our author's, written on an English story; and that these allusions are introduced very much in the same manner as they are introduced in the plays of Greene, Peele, Lodge, and other dramatists, who preceded Shakspeare; that is, they do not naturally arise out of the subject, but seem to be inserted merely to show the writer's learning."

Malone further showed that, in the *First Part of King Henry VI.* there are historical mistakes, which are not repeated in the *Third Part* (being there corrected in the additions made to *The Contention*) or in *King Henry V.*; and that there are also contradictions between the *First Part of King Henry VI.* and *The Contention* and *The True Tragedie*—all which facts, taken together, show (*a*) that the two latter works were not written by the same hand as the *First Part of King Henry VI*; (*b*) that none of them were written by Shakespeare originally.

Passing on to the question of the authorship of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke*, Malone urged:

1. That they were acted by the Earl of Pembroke's servants, as well as *The Taming of A Shrew* and *Titus Andronicus*, while not one of Shakespeare's plays is said on the title-page to have been acted by any but the Lord Chamberlain's, or the Queen's, or the King's servants.

2. That Greene, in his *Groatsworth of Wit*, accuses Shakespeare of plagiarism, and this makes it probable that Shakespeare had stolen *The Contention* and *Richard, Duke of Yorke*, which may have been written by either Marlowe, Greene, or Peele, or by all three together. Shakespeare worked on other men's labours, as we see in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *King John*.

In elaborating his argument from diction and versification, Malone's method was to compare the language and metrical style of *The Contention* and *Richard, Duke of Yorke*, with the late manner of Shakespeare, on the one hand, and with the manner of Marlowe Greene, and Peele, on the other; and

whenever he found close resemblances between the old plays and the plays of Shakespeare's predecessors, he found an argument for the old plays being the work of the latter. A single passage may be taken as a sample of his reasoning:—

Two lines in *The Third Part of King Henry VI.* have been produced as a decisive and incontrovertible proof that these pieces were originally and entirely written by Shakespeare. "Who," says Mr. Capell, "that sees not the future monster, *and acknowledges at the same time the pen that drew it*, in these two lines only, spoken over a king who lies stabbed before him [*i.e.* before Richard, Duke of Gloster]—

> What, will the aspiring blood of Lancaster
> Sink in the ground? I thought it would have mounted—

let him never pretend to discernment hereafter in any case of this nature." The two lines above quoted are found in *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke, etc.*, on which, according to my hypothesis, Shakespeare's *Third Part of King Henry VI.* was formed. If, therefore, these lines decisively mark the hand of Shakespeare, the *old*, as well as the *new*, play must have been written by him, and the fabric which I have built with some labour falls at once to the ground. But let not the reader be alarmed; for, if it suffers from no other battery but this, it may last to the crack of doom. Marlowe, as Dr. Farmer observes to me, has the very same phraseology in *King Edward II.*:—

> Scorning that the lowly earth
> Should drink his blood, mounts up into the air,

and in the same play I have lately noticed another line in which we find the very epithet here applied to the pious Lancastrian king:—

> Frown'st thou thereat, aspiring Lancaster?

So much for Mr. Capell's irrefragable proof. It is not the business of the present Essay to enter further into the subject. I merely seize the opportunity of saying that the preceding passages now incline me to think Marlowe the author of *The True Tragedie of Richard, Duke of Yorke, etc.*, and perhaps of the other old drama also entitled *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster.*

Marshalled in this precise manner, the arguments of Malone proved effective enough to persuade English critics that none of the plays impeached could be really Shakespeare's. Porson is said to have pronounced Malone's reasoning the most convincing piece of literary criticism with which he was acquainted: the

conclusions of the latter were substantially adopted by his disciple, Boswell, and afterwards by Dyce, both editors of Shakespeare's works, while Hallam acquiesced in the suggestion that *Henry VI.* may have been the work partly of Marlowe, partly of Greene.[1]

Yet, in spite of the effect it produced, and of the industry and ingenuity with which it is constructed, the argument of Malone, when examined in detail, is seen to be of the frailest. A work of genius always carries on its face the unmistakable personality of the author. True; but it is a fallacy to suppose that this character will be always of one rigid and immutable type. On Malone's principle of criticism, it is certain that (internal evidence being alone considered) a person judging of Tennyson's style by *In Memoriam* or *The Idylls of the King*, without any historical study of the development of his genius, would deny that he could have had any share in the authorship of *Poems by Two Brothers*, published in 1827, and evidently written in imitation of Byron. Such is precisely the value of the reasoning of those who deny the authorship of the *First Part of King Henry VI.* to Shakespeare, because it contains "more allusions to mythology," etc., than are found in the later English histories of Shakespeare, and because "those allusions are introduced very much in the same manner as they are introduced in the works of Greene, Peele, Lodge, and other dramatists who preceded Shakespeare."

The argument founded on *historical contradictions in the* different plays proves nothing whatever: there is no reason why one and the same author should not have committed an error as to fact in one play, and have corrected it in a play of later date.

Nor is there any more strength in the reasoning that *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* cannot have been the work of Shakespeare, because these plays were acted by the Earl of Pembroke's Company, while all the later plays of Shakespeare, published with his name, were acted only by the Lord Chamberlain's, or the Queen's, or the King's Players The early plays in question were produced while Shakespeare was a young man, lately arrived in London, and (assuming him to have been the author of them) he may well have associated at that time, like Marlowe and his contemporaries, mainly with the Earl of Pembroke's Company. Such an association would, indeed, account for the close friendship which sprang up in course of time between Shakespeare and William Herbert, if, as is at least possible, the latter is identical with "Mr. W. H." of the Sonnets.

But it is said that Greene in his *Groatsworth of Wit* plainly accuses Shakespeare of plagiarism; and it is probable that the

[1] Hallam's *History of European Literature* (1854), vol. ii. p. 171.

theft he had in his mind was Shakespeare's adaptation of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*. That the first of these propositions is true admits of no doubt; at any rate Greene sneers at Shakespeare as a copyist; but as to the inference that he is alluding to anything so particular as Malone supposes, the reader may judge for himself. Greene warns Marlowe and Peele not to rely upon their favour with the public: "Trust them not: for there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygre's heart wrapt in a Player's hyde*, supposes hee is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." Naturally interpreted, these words seem to express the apprehensions of a jealous rival who warns his associates that Shakespeare has copied the new blank verse style which they have introduced on the stage, and is likely to develop it in such a manner as to deprive them of their popularity: the expressions would be much too weak to describe the action of a poet who had stolen hundreds (nay thousands) of lines from plays written by the speaker and his companions, to reproduce them in a play which he pretended to be his own.

Malone's incapacity for reasoning correctly from the facts which he had accurately and industriously collected is most apparent in the triumphant tone of his reply to Capell, who had justly noted the Shakespearian manner in two lines occurring both in the *Third Part of Henry VI.* and *The True Tragedy.* Capell is obviously referring to the spirit and character of the passage, but Malone thinks it quite sufficient, in answer, to point out that similar expressions are found in Marlowe's *Edward II.*—a fact on which he founds the extraordinary conclusion that Marlowe was probably the author of *The True Tragedy.* He did not see either that, though the two lines in *The True Tragedy* might very well have been suggested by the passage he cited from Marlowe, their grandeur depended entirely on the new turn given to the image, or that it was extremely improbable that a poet of a powerful genius like Marlowe, rapid and fluent in composition, should have fallen back on the poverty-stricken device of borrowing from his own writings. The lines are evidently the work of an imitator of Marlowe, not of Marlowe himself.

Meantime the opinions of the German critics, who had from the first argued in behalf of the authenticity of *King Henry VI.*, began to make an impression on the English editors of Shakespeare, as was shown by Charles Knight's edition, published in 1842, in which the authorship of the whole of *Henry VI.*, as well as of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, was assigned to

Shakespeare. Neither the Germans nor Knight, however, took the trouble to demonstrate the weakness of Malone's argument; so that, though they reasoned ingeniously in defence of their own hypothesis, the two theories remained confronting each other in the mind of the reader as rival possibilities. It was left for an American editor, Grant White, to test systematically the value of the opinion that, in the *Second and Third Parts of Henry VI.*, Shakespeare was reconstructing without acknowledgment the work of another man. White went a long way towards presenting a true view of the case. After an accurate examination of the facts, he showed that "more than 3400 lines in the *Second and Third Parts of Henry VI.* are taken bodily from, or based upon passages in, *The Contention* and *True Tragedy*." "If Shake-

[illegible]

Shakespeare to be the author both of the earlier and later plays. Unfortunately White could not rid his mind of the impression made on it by Malone's interpretation of the passage in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit.* He still thought that Greene, when he spoke of Shakespeare as "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers," meant to set up a claim for a share in *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* for himself, Marlowe, and Peele.[2] White therefore strove to account for all the facts of the case on a new hypothesis. Shakespeare, Greene, Marlowe, and perhaps Peele, he thought, according to the co-operative play-writing of the day, composed the two old dramas for the Earl of Pembroke's Company. "Shakespeare afterwards made these plays into the *Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI.* for the company with which he became exclusively connected, by rewriting and rejecting the parts contributed by his former co-labourers, and retaining his own contributions, with such additions and amendments as might be expected from any writer upon the revision of a work produced in his earlier years of authorship."[3]

White's hypothesis was accepted by Lowell as satisfactory, and since he had proved beyond all question that Shakespeare had at any rate a hand in the composition of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, these plays were in course of time rightly included in the monumental Cambridge edition of Shakespeare's Works. But, as a whole, White's reasoning is perhaps even

[1] Grant White, *Shakespeare's Works*, vol. vii. p. 451.
[2] *Ibid.* vol. vii. p. 412.
[3] *Ibid.* vol. vii. p. 458.

more elaborately perverse than that of Malone. The mere fact that Shakespeare, in the *Second and Third Parts of Henry VI.*, rejected a certain number of lines which were written by his partners in the composition of the early plays, and replaced them by others of his own, would not relieve him of the charge of gross plagiarism of ideas, or make it comprehensible that Greene should have referred to his proceedings in the comparatively mild language employed in the *Groatsworth of Wit.* Those who will take the trouble to compare *The Contention* with the *Second Part of Henry VI.*, and *The True Tragedy* with the *Third Part*, will find that Shakespeare has preserved the structure and details of the early plays in the smallest particulars, and has merely amplified or pointed the diction to make it more polished and dramatic.[1] Moreover, the lines which Shakespeare has rejected in the earlier tragedies are so interwoven with others which he has retained, as to make it incredible he should have proceeded on the deliberate principle of striking out whatever he had not written himself in the early plays, with a view to avoiding the charge of theft; more especially as in *King Henry VI.* he has twice appropriated lines from Marlowe's *Edward II.*

Looking at their structure and character, which are of much more importance than their verbal detail, I venture to say that no dispassionate reader can peruse *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* without perceiving that—even admitting a practice of co-operation between dramatists at so early a date, of which, so far as I am aware, there is no proof whatever—these plays are the work of a single mind. That was not the mind of Greene, Peele, or Marlowe. We may say with absolute certainty that it would have been impossible for the author of *Edward I.* or the author of *James IV.* to have conceived the combination of events and the contrast of characters which give a certain tragic unity to *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy.* Marlowe, indeed, might have created the characters of the Duke of York and the Duke of Gloucester; but, judging by *Edward II.* and his other historical dramas, it is certain that he would have constructed his play, as a whole, without regard to historical accuracy, and solely with a view to the illustration of his own moral principles.

[1] The only important alterations in the structure that I have observed are: (1) in Act iii. Sc. 2 of *Henry VI.*, Part II., in which the murder of Duke Humphrey is not presented on the stage as it is in the same act and scene of *The Contention*; (2) in Act iv. Sc. 2 some of the names used in the earlier play are altered. In Act ii. Sc. 5 of *Henry VI.*, Part III., Henry's soliloquy is much lengthened. In Act iv. Scs. 3-6 of *Henry VI.*, Part III., there is a considerable amount of transposition of the scenes of *The True Tragedy.* In Act v. Sc. 2 of *Henry VI.*, Part III., King Edward does not appear as he does in the same act and scene of *The True Tragedy.*

Shakespeare was the one dramatist alive capable of imagining the vast conflict of powerful wills, selfish purposes, and struggling ambitions, presented by the annals of the Wars of the Roses—the only one who had sufficient grasp of mind to imagine that historic drama as a consistent whole.

If this reasoning be accepted, and if (with the folio edition) we conclude Shakespeare to be the sole author of *King Henry VI.*, and credit him also with *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, some very important consequences will follow. Malone argued that the two latter plays were not Shakespeare's, because (among other reasons) that poet "worked on other men's labours, as we see in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *King John.*" He means that Shakespeare recast the plays inserted in the folio of 1623 under these titles from two older plays entitled—one, *The Taming of A Shrew*, which was first published in 1594, and the other, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, first printed in 1591. Malone never admitted the possibility of the old plays being early productions of Shakespeare himself; nevertheless, in a reprint of *The Troublesome Raigne* in 1622, the authorship was ascribed to Shakespeare on the title-page. Those who follow Malone of course argue that the bookseller wished to entrap unwary purchasers by making them suppose the book to be identical with the later version; but we have no proof that Shakespeare's *King John* in its present shape was published before its appearance in the folio of 1623. However this may be, it is certain that, in recasting the old play, Shakespeare proceeded on almost exactly the same lines as in his alteration of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*. True, he scarcely preserved any of the original dialogue, which is not wonderful, seeing that *The Troublesome Raigne* is evidently an older and cruder piece of work than the originals of *King Henry VI.*, but he kept all the characters and the entire framework of the action, just as he did in the recast of *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, and the conclusion of the play is substantially identical with that of *King John*:—

BASTARD. Thus England's peace begins in Harry's reign,
And bloody wars are closed with happy league.
Let England live but true within itself,
And all the world can never wrong her state.

. . . . .

If England's peers and people join in one,
Nor Pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong

From this conclusion we may reasonably infer that the play was written after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, to gratify the strong patriotic and Protestant feeling of the people. The idea

of King John's character is founded on Bale's *King Johan*, as may be seen from the prologue:[1]—

> You that with friendly grace of smoothed brow
> Have entertained the Scythian Tamburlaine,
> And given applause unto an infidel,
> Vouchsafe to welcome (with like courtesy)
> A warlike Christian and your countryman.
> For Christ's true faith endured he many a storm,
> And set himself against the Man of Rome,
> Until base treason (by a damned wight)
> Did all his former triumphs put to flight.
> Accept of it (sweet gentles) in good sort,
> And think it was prepared for your disport.

As to the authorship of the play, the writer, in his conception of character, frequently shows himself to be an imitator of Marlowe. The character of the Bastard, in its first draft, is evidently intended to be mainly a study of Resolution on the lines of Tamburlaine, Guise, and Mortimer. John's character is also constructed on the Machiavellian principle, as may be seen from his soliloquy after Arthur's murder, when he is deserted by the Barons:—

> Then, John, there is no way to keep thy crown
> But finely to dissemble with the Pope:
> That hand that gave the wound must give the salve,
> To cure the hurt else quite incurable.
> Thy sins are far too great to be the man
> T' abolish Pope and Popery from thy realm;
> But in thy seat, if I may guess at all,
> A king shall reign that shall suppress them all.
> Peace, John, here comes the Legate of the Pope;
> Dissemble thou, and whatsoe'er thou sayst,
> Yet with thy heart wish their confusion.

In his style the author of *The Troublesome Raigne* imitates the ranting manner of Peele. When the Bastard sees Lymoges—the Austria of Shakespeare's King John—wearing his father's lion skin, he breaks out:—

> How doth Alecto whisper in my ears,
> Delay not, Philip, kill the villain straight;
> Disrobe him of the matchless ornament,
> Thy father's triumph o'er the savages!
> Base herd-groom, coward, peasant, worse than threshing slave,
> What makst thou with the trophy of a king,

[1] For an account of Bale's *King Johan*, see vol. ii. pp. 375-378.

Too precious for a monarch's coverture?
Scarce can I temper due obedience
Unto the presence of my sovereign
From acting outrage on the trunk of hate:
But arm thee, traitor, wronger of renown,
For by his soul I swear, my father's soul,
Twice will I not review the morning's rise,
Till I have torn that trophy from thy back,
And split thy heart for wearing it so long.

Peele's softer descriptive style is copied in the following passage:—

Methinks I hear a hollow echo sound
That Philip is the son unto a king.
The whistling leaves upon the trembling trees
Whistle in concert, I am Richard's son·
The babbling murmur of the water's fall
Records *Philippus, Regis Filius:*
Birds in their flight make music with their wings,
Filling the air with glory of my birth:
Birds, bubbles, leaves, and mountain's echo, all
Ring in mine ears that I am Richard's son.

Nor is Greene left without the flattery of imitation. His comic manner is reproduced in a scene imagined in the worst and crudest taste, representing "Fair Alice the Nun" concealed in a chest in the chamber of the Abbot of Swinstead when the monastery is ransacked by the Bastard. In the later version of *King John* Shakespeare utterly suppresses this portion of the older play.

But while he thus imitated the leading dramatists of the day, the writer of *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* gave evidence of striking original genius. In the energy and dignity of the State debates, the life of the incidents, the variety and contrast of the characters, and the power of conceiving the onward movement of a great historical action, there is a quality of dramatic workmanship exhibited in the play quite above the genius of Peele, Greene, or even Marlowe. It is noteworthy also that the representation of mental conflict is a marked feature in *The Troublesome Raigne.* This characteristic of the moralities, eliminated from the creations of Marlowe, is vividly illustrated in the character of Hubert, as appears from the following speech:—

I faint, I fear, my conscience bids desist.
Faint, did I say? Fear was it that I named?
My king commands; that warrant sets me free,
But God forbids, and He commandeth kings.

That great Commander counterchecks my charge,
He stays my hand, he maketh soft my heart.
Go, cursed tool, your office is exempt.
Cheer thee, young lord, thou shalt not lose an eye,
Though I should purchase it with loss of life

Grant White concludes as to the authorship of *The Troublesome Raigne* :—

It has been conjectured with great probability that Greene, Peele, and Marlowe were concerned in the composition of the old history; and it is barely possible that Shakespeare, who seems to have begun his career as their humble co-labourer, contributed something to it as like in style to what they wrote as he could make it.

The old play, thanks to the enterprise of Mr. Furnivall and his associates, is now accessible to the general English reader: any one who will peruse it can judge for himself as to the "great probability" of the above hypothesis. Though it is not well constructed for acting purposes, *The Troublesome Raigne* presents none of that patchwork appearance which would be expected from the composition of three separate minds, but has as much unity of conception as Shakespeare's *King John*. Like *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, it is knit together in a manner far superior to any historic play of Marlowe, Greene, or Peele; and it has been subjected by Shakespeare, *mutatis mutandis*, to almost precisely the same process of reconstruction as he employed in converting the two plays just mentioned into the *Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI.* Assuming him to have been "the humble co-labourer" of Marlowe and his scholars, he cannot be acquitted of mean plagiarism, when, without making any acknowledgments to his former partners, he wrote *King John*. If, on the other hand, we put aside this incredible hypothesis, and assume him to have been the sole author of *The Troublesome Raigne*, we credit him with a drama doubtless crude, ill-constructed, full of obvious imitation, such as might be expected from a dramatist of small experience, but yet containing more of the elements of greatness than any historic play which had yet been produced on the English stage.

In considering the question of the original of *The Taming of the Shrew*, I will first place before the reader the reasoning of others. Charles Knight's account of the genesis of the play may be taken to represent the view of himself and of Malone He says :—

The Taming of the Shrew was first printed in the folio collection of Shakespeare's plays in 1623. In 1594 "A Pleasant Conceited

Historie called the Taming of a Shrew" was printed. This comedy of some unknown author opens with an Induction, the characters of which are a lord, Slie, a tapster, page, players, and huntsmen. The incidents are precisely the same as those of the play which we call Shakespeare's. The scene of *The Taming of A Shrew* is laid at Athens; that of Shakespeare's at Padua. The Athens of the one and the Padua of the other are resorts of learning. Alfonso, a merchant of Athens (the Baptista of Shakespeare), has three daughters, Kate, Emelia, and Phylema. Aurelius, son of the Duke of Cestus (Sestos), is enamoured of one, Polidor of another, and Ferando (the Petrucio of Shakespeare) of Kate, the Shrew. The merchant hath sworn (before he will allow his two younger daughters to be addressed by suitors) that

His eldest daughter first shall be espoused.

The wooing of Kate by Ferando is exactly in the same spirit as the wooing by Petrucio; so is the marriage; so the lenten entertainment of the bride in Ferando's country house; so the scene with the tailor and haberdasher; so the prostrate obedience of the Tamed Shrew. The underplot, however, is different. But all parties are ultimately happy and pleased; and the comedy ends with a wager, as in Shakespeare, about the obedience of the several wives.

What then is the natural conclusion from these premises? Knight at least knew that it had been drawn. Tieck, he says, held "that *The Taming of A Shrew* was a youthful work of Shakespeare himself." He knew also that, if it was anything else, Shakespeare ought at least to have made some acknowledgment of his debt to the genius of another. Nevertheless he concluded, on Malone's principle: "To our mind this play is totally different from *the* imagery and *the* versification of Shakespeare."[1] He conjectured that *The Taming of A Shrew* was the work of Greene, and he thought that both Greene and Shakespeare drew upon a still older version of the play.

Another theory was advanced by Grant White:—

It is quite uncertain (he says) who was the author of *The Taming of A Shrew*. Malone supposed, and Mr. Knight has argued, that it was Robert Greene; but an American correspondent of the latter showed that if Greene were its author he was not only an open imitator of Marlowe, but a deliberate plagiarist from him in at least ten passages. In my opinion it is the joint production of Greene, Marlowe, and possibly Shakespeare, who seem to have worked

[1] And yet Charles Knight was quite able to see that the difference between the styles of *King Henry VI.* and Shakespeare's later plays was to be accounted for by the growth and expansion of the poet's genius!

together for the Earl of Pembroke's servants during the first three years of Shakespeare's London life. Much the greater part of it appears to be the work of Greene: Marlowe probably contributed but little, and Shakespeare, if at all, much less.

Of this I will only say that, had it not been for Malone's disastrous suggestion that *King Henry VI.* was a *plagiarism* from *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, I believe we should never have heard anything about collaboration, either in these plays or in *The Taming of A Shrew.* The latter drama is obviously the work of one mind: the beautiful fancy of the Induction is worked into the whole structure of the play, nor is there any appearance of incongruity in the sentiment and diction. Who then wrote the piece? If any one can believe that it was the author either of *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* or of *Faustus*, he will believe any critical dogma that may be proposed to him. If, on the other hand, any man, because he looks vainly in *The Taming of A Shrew* for the style, say, of *Twelfth Night* or *As You Like It*, refuses to assent to the suggestion that, in the elvish humour of the Induction, we have the early work of the creator of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*, it appears to me that he has an imperfect insight into the processes of poetical conception, gestation, birth, and growth.

The other plays, the authorship of which has been questioned, but which are usually included in Shakespeare's works, are *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles.* The authenticity of the former is supported by very strong external evidence. Meres, as early as 1598, assigns it without any doubt to Shakespeare, and it is included in the folio of 1623. In 1790, Malone, in the most arbitrary manner, rejected it on the evidence of Ravenscroft, an actor who, in 1687, published an edition of the play, and said in his preface: "I have been told by some, anciently conversant with the stage, that it was not originally his [Shakespeare's], but brought by a private author to be acted, and that he only gave some master touches to one or two of the principal characters." These words in themselves ought to have shown Malone the worthlessness of Ravenscroft's testimony, as—apart from the fact that, before 1590, Shakespeare was not in a position to exert such influence as is here supposed—they prove that the persons who started the story were quite ignorant of the way in which plays were introduced upon the stage in Shakespeare's time. Falling in, however, with the supposed strength of the internal evidence against the play, they were accepted as a sufficient warrant for rejecting it from Shakespeare's work, and Hallam says: "*Titus Andronicus* is now *by common consent* denied to be in any sense a production of Shakespeare; very

few passages, I should think not one, resemble his manner." The historian adds in a note, with his usual fairness: "Notwithstanding this internal evidence, Meres, so early as 1598, enumerates *Titus Andronicus* among the plays of Shakespeare, and mentions no other but what is genuine. But in criticism of all kinds we must acquire a dogged habit of resisting testimony when *res ipsa per se vociferatur* to the contrary."[1]

Judged by the standard of *Macbeth* and *Lear*, *Titus Andronicus* is, no doubt, a tragedy unworthy of Shakespeare. It is a melodrama of the school of Marlowe and Kyd, crude, exaggerated, bloody, and often absurd, both in its representation of incident and character. These defects, however, do not prove that it is a play unlikely to have been written by Shakespeare about 1589, nor do they justify any critic in disbelieving the statement both of Meres and of Heminge and Condell that Shakespeare did write it. Contrarily, there are passages in the tragedy which, with due deference to Hallam's judgment to the contrary, could scarcely have come from any hand but Shakespeare's. Let any episode either in *The Jew of Malta* or *The Spanish Tragedy* be compared with the scene in which Titus Andronicus first meets his mutilated daughter, and the reader may judge whether either Marlowe or Kyd—both of whom would have been quite capable of the extravagances by which the latter passage is marred—could have produced its strokes of pathos and sublimity.[2]

As to *Pericles* I am much more doubtful. Under the 20th of May 1608 there is the following entry in the Register of the Stationers' Company: "Edward Blount—entred for his copie under thandes [the hands] of Sir George Buck, knight, and Master Warden Seton, a booke called *The Booke of Pericles, Prince of Tyre.*" This may have been a version of the play, which must have been produced about 1607 or 1608, for it is spoken of as "recently presented" in *The Painful Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, a novel by George Wilkins, published in 1608. In the following year the printer, Henry Gosson, published a very corrupt text of the play, apparently taken down in shorthand during the performance at the theatre, and on the title-page he inserted the words, "By William Shakespeare." *Pericles* is also alluded to as the work of Shakespeare in a book called *The Times Displayed in Six Sestiads* (1646); in the prologue to *The Jovial Crew*, by R. Brome (1652); and by Dryden in his *Essay on the Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age* (1672). All these references may, it is plain, depend on the very unsatisfactory

[1] Hallam, *History of European Literature* (1860), vol. ii. p. 277 (note).

[2] See passage printed on pp. 57-58, *Titus Andronicus*, Act. iii. Sc. 1, 57-135.

evidence of authorship displayed on Gosson's title-page; and it is to be remembered that Heminge and Condell did not include the play in the folio of 1623.

From the diction and versification of portions of the play there would be no difficulty in supposing it to be Shakespeare's; but its undramatic construction, and the awkward devices employed by the author to connect the different acts, forbid us to believe that Shakespeare would have constructed a new work of this kind for the stage so late as 1608. Nor is the difficulty removed by accepting the tradition preserved by Dryden in his prologue to *Circe*, that *Pericles* was Shakespeare's first work, for the style is in general quite unlike that in any of the plays written while he was still under the influence of Marlowe. On the whole, both from the resemblance between the incidents of the two plays and in the characters of Perdita and Marina, it might be conjectured that *Pericles* was a fragmentary draft of an early romantic drama in the vein of *The Winter's Tale*, afterwards abandoned by the poet in favour of the more mature conception founded on Greene's story of *Pandosto*. The fragments, in that case, may have been pieced together, either by Shakespeare himself, or with his consent, by some inferior playwright, who, observing the epic device by which Time as chorus is introduced before the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale* to explain the progress of the action, extended this, awkwardly enough, by using Gower as the "presenter" of *Pericles*. As we are without certain knowledge of the date at which *The Winter's Tale* was first produced, there is nothing in the way of this hypothesis; in any case, in view of the fact that *Pericles* was not included in the folio of 1623, we are under no obligation to accept it as being entirely Shakespeare's. The same principle may confidently be adopted in the case of the other doubtful plays included with *Pericles* in the folio of 1664, none of which are of any value in considering the development of Shakespeare's art.

From the foregoing considerations we arrive at the following results:—

1. That there are no sufficient internal reasons to warrant us in resisting the testimony of the folio of 1623 that *Titus Andronicus* and *King Henry VI.* are the work of Shakespeare.

2. That if *King Henry VI.* is the work of Shakespeare, *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy* are also his; otherwise, as Grant White says, he must be branded with unexampled plagiarism.

3. That, by parity of reasoning, *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* and *The Taming of A Shrew* may also be confidently regarded as his early work.

This being so, we are in a position to study the genius of

Shakespeare from the very outset of his dramatic career, and to trace the steps by which he gradually advanced from these crude beginnings to such consummate masterpieces of art as *King Henry IV.*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Macbeth*. And the first thing to be noticed about the quality of his early work is the extent to which his genius was influenced by the example of other poets, and more particularly Marlowe. Coming to London soon after Marlowe had revolutionised the practice of the stage with *Tamburlaine*, Shakespeare naturally accommodated his style to the taste in vogue, and so great was his admiration for Marlowe that he often transferred whole passages from the tragedies of the latter into a new, and sometimes comic, context of his own. Especially is this the case in *The Taming of A Shrew*, as may be seen from the following passages:—

> Now that the gloomy shadow of the night,
> Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,
> Leaps from the antarctic world unto the sky,
> And dims the welkin with his pitchy breath.
> (Induction to *The Taming of A Shrew*, Sc. i. 10-13.)

These lines are taken word for word from *Faustus*: we may therefore be fairly sure that they were not put into *The Taming of A Shrew* by Marlowe.

> Whose eyes are brighter than the lamps of heaven,
> Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone.
> (*The Taming of A Shrew*, Act i. Sc. 1.)

Marlowe writes in *Tamburlaine*, Part I. Act iii. Sc. 3:—

> Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone,
> Whose eyes are brighter than the lamps of heaven.

The following lines from *The Taming of A Shrew*, Act i. Sc. 1 are to be found in *Tamburlaine*, Part I. Act v. Sc. 2:—

> Image of honour and nobility,
> *In whose sweet person is comprised the sum*
> Of Nature's skill and heavenly majesty.

Shakespeare, in *The Taming of A Shrew*, Act iii. Sc. 1, makes Emelia say:—

> Eternal heaven sooner be dissolved,
> And all that pierceth Phœbus' silver eyes,
> Before such hap befall to Polidor

The same lines occur in *Tamburlaine*, Part I. Act iii. Sc. 2, with the variation :—

> Before such hap fall to Zenocrate.

Tamburlaine says (Part I. Act i. Sc. 2) to Zenocrate :—

> Thy garments shall be made of Median silk,
> Enchased with precious jewels of mine own.

Ferando says to Kate in *The Taming of A Shrew*, Act iii. Sc. 2 :—

> Thou shalt have garments wrought of Median silk,
> Embost with precious jewels fetched from far.

The rhetorical extravagance of Marlowe and Peele often runs through a whole speech, as in this of Ferando in *The Taming of A Shrew* :—

> Tush, Kate! these words addes greater love in me,
> And makes me thinke thee fairer than before.
> Sweet Kate, the lovelier than Diana's purple robe,
> Whiter than are the snowy Apenis,
> Or icie haire that grows on Boreas' chin.
> Father, I sweare by Ibis' golden beake,
> More faire and radiente is my bonie Kate,
> Than silver Zanthus when he doth embrace
> The ruddie Simois at Ida's feete.
> And care not thou, sweete Kate, how I be clad;
> Thou shalt have garments wrought of Median silke
> Embost with precious jewels, fetcht from far
> By Italian marchants, that with Russian stemes
> Plous up huge forowes in the Terren-Maine;
> And better farre my lovely Kate shall weare.

Shakespeare not only copied the external manner of Marlowe: he felt profoundly the dramatic force of the Machiavellian principle that determined the conception of character and action in Marlowe's plays. The character of Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, doubtless Shakespeare's earliest pure tragedy, is founded on that of Barabas: the former's revelation of his character is almost identical with that of the latter in *The Jew of Malta* :—

> LUCIUS. Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds?
> AARON. Ay, that I had not done a thousand more.
> Even now I curse the day—and yet I think
> Few come within the compass of my curse—
> Wherein I did not some notorious ill;

> As kill a man, or else devise his death,
> Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it,
> Accuse some innocent and forswear myself,
> Set deadly enmity between two friends,
> Make poor men's cattle break their necks,
> Set fire on barns and hay-stacks in the night,
> And bid the owners quench them with their tears.
> Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves,
> And set them upright at their dear friends' doors,
> Even when their sorrows almost were forgot;
> And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
> Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,
> "Let not your sorrow die though I am dead."[1]

In the same spirit is written the opening soliloquy of Gloucester in *Richard III.*, a play which of course is closely connected with the cycle beginning with *The Contention of the Houses of York and Lancaster.* The character of York in this play (now the *Second Part of Henry VI*) is also conceived on the Machiavellian principle, and resembles the parts of Mortimer in *Edward II*, and of Guise in *The Massacre at Paris.* From all this, and many other features of the same kind in the early plays of Shakespeare, it is easy to understand why Greene should have spoken of the latter as "an upstart crow beautified with our feathers," without intending to accuse him of stealing plays that were largely the property of other dramatists The expression "an absolute Johannes Factotum" doubtless implies that—as was the case—Shakespeare was ready to write in any style, tragic, historic, or comic.

But however much the spirit of the imitator prevails in Shakespeare's early dramas, it is not their most characteristic feature. I confess that I find, in these comparatively rude and defective works, matter of scarcely less interest than in some of his maturer performances. Here is to be seen the first stirring of a mighty intelligence, capable of forming a mental view of the complexity of human society, the earliest efforts of an incomparable dramatic skill, seizing with lightning intuition on the meaning of conflicting principles in art and nature, and blending them into one harmonious whole. Something of the doctrine of Vanity taught by mediæval theology pervades them, something of the moral revolt of the Reformation against external authority, something of the contemplative philosophy of the Renaissance, we see not only the crimes and selfishness of man, but his aspirations after goodness, the pangs of his penitent reflection, the scruples

[1] *Titus Andronicus*, Act v. Sc. 1.

of religion in his guilty soul. In *Andronicus* a villain, as black as Barabas, moves among scenes of horror, as intricate as the plot of *The Spanish Tragedy;* but the tone of the play is to some extent elevated and made pathetic by the figure of Titus, a lofty and patriotic mind pushed from its base by the extremes of treachery and ingratitude. In *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, the central character of the tyrant is contrasted with the interesting persons of the Bastard, Hubert, and Arthur, so admirably developed in the later version of the play.

But it is in his representation of political storm and chaos, in *The Contention* and *The True Tragedy*, that the comprehensive grasp of Shakespeare's genius is most apparent. Here, besides the ambitious Machiavellism of York and Gloucester, we have, in the dying Beaufort, the remorse of conscience prefigured by Sackville in *The Mirror of Magistrates ;* the pious weakness of Henry; the mutual passion of Suffolk and Margaret ; the perpetual conflict of the well-discriminated representatives of the rival factions ; while, mingling with the whole, and mitigating the sense of horror and blood, appear the rich humours of the populace, the coward Peter, the impostor Simpcox, the braggart Cade. Already we have before us all the elements of that marvellously blended conception of historic action, heroic resolution, and mortal frailty, in a word, of human life, which, in *King Henry IV.* and *King Henry V.*, transports the imagination to the varied scenes of the Archdeacon's house at Bangor, the Boar's Head, and the Battle of Agincourt.

Even more interesting is *The Taming of A Shrew.* Johnson has been reproached for maintaining that Shakespeare had a greater native inclination to comedy than to tragedy ; and indeed, in so far as his criticism is intended to disparage the merit of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, it is very ill-founded.[1] Nevertheless, I think it is a question whether Shakespeare's comic style does not afford proof of more original genius than even his tragic inventions. In the latter he had at least before him the great example of Marlowe ; but the only models of English comedy to which he could look were the later Moralities, with their imitation of manners ; Lyly's Court comedies, which were little more than witty dialogues ; the buffooneries of Greene in his romantic plays ; and a rude imitation of Plautus, like *Ralph Roister Doister.* In the early draft of *The Taming of A Shrew* we have the first refined English comedy, and we may observe in it the earliest movement of invention which led Shakespeare, step by step, first to the fairy machinery of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, and afterwards to the romantic plot and character of such mixed compositions as *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado about Nothing.*

[1] See his Preface, Malone's *Shakespeare*, vol. i. pp. 70-71.

Finally, the reasoning that is here offered to the reader as to the authorship of these early tragedies and comedies has its bearing on a question, or, as I should prefer to call it, a mania, which continues to agitate the mind of literary society, with regard to the authorship of all the plays generally believed to be Shakespeare's. There are some persons—I do not think that among them are included any serious students of Shakespeare—who start with the assumption that the production, by a lowly native of a provincial English town, of plays which rival or surpass the works of Æschylus and Sophocles, is a miracle too great to be believed To point out that to Shakespeare's contemporaries there appeared nothing miraculous in the fact; that in 1592 Shakespeare was regarded by Greene merely as a rival; that in 1598 he was recognised by Meres as the foremost writer of the time in tragedy and comedy; that in 1612 he was classed by Webster with other playwrights like Dekker and Heywood; that in 1623 the characteristics of his genius are critically described in the edition of his dramatic works published by his intimate friends and fellow-actors, Heminge and Condell; that neither of his great poetical eulogists—Ben Jonson, his contemporary and rival, and Milton, who was born while he was yet alive—entertained the slightest doubt that he was the author of the works ascribed to him;—to argue in this elementary manner with the persons I am speaking of is of course perfectly useless. Since they begin with the assumption that Shakespeare could not have been the author of the plays which appeared under his name, they proceed at once to the proof of the particular paradox they wish to establish, and all considerations of common sense are soon lost sight of in the midst of a maze of cryptograms and other hieroglyphics. Far be it from me to dispute their premises. If any man is so intent on proving that a great genius could not have come out of Stratford-on-Avon as to prefer to believe in the much greater miracle that Bacon, the translator of Psalm xc. into English verse, was capable of writing *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, it is idle for any student of poetry to question his conclusion.

But to the reasonable reader of Shakespeare who, while filled with admiration for his stupendous genius, marvels how such vast results can have been produced with such slender external resources, I would fain hope that the historical method I have adopted may prove useful, by showing, however imperfectly, that the poet's art was of gradual development. It will be seen from the body of this History that, instead of springing, Minerva-like, into sudden and complete perfection, his matured dramatic style was the result of growth and experience; that his own

poetic architecture was largely based on foundations laid by his predecessors; and that his mode of dramatic expression, far from being uniform, varied greatly from period to period, according to the diversities of his own spiritual conception. And these being unquestionable facts, ought to destroy many edifices of capricious fancy.

END OF VOL. IV.

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